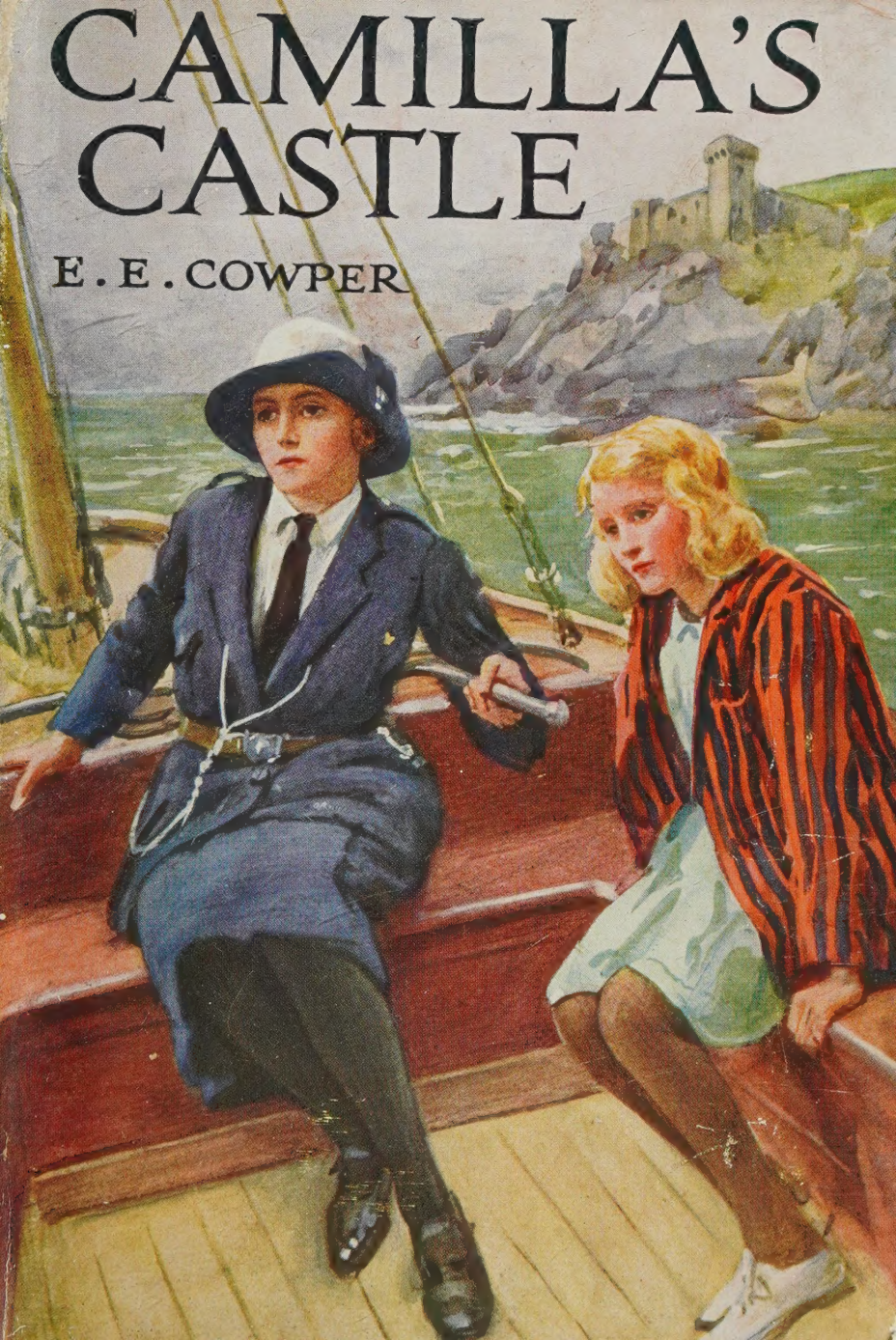
CAMILLA'S CASTLE

E. E. COWPER



CAMILLA'S CASTLE

By E. E. COWPER

Illustrated by Roger Oak

The story opens with Camilla's triumph, for a reply to her advertisement has just come in, and that reply decides the immediate future of the Carmichael family. They rent a real castle in Brittany.

A castle, however, can have its disadvantages, especially when unauthorized people go out and in at will, mysteriously, after dark.

How such happenings were discovered by the young Carmichaels and put an end to with the help of The Skipper and her crew of Sea Guides; and the parts played by Etoile de Ruvigny and her devoted servants, is a thrilling narrative unrolled beneath the glory of a Brittany moon, and in the misty silence of a Brittany night.

Printed in Great Britain

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CAMILLA'S CASTLE

BLACKIE & SON LIMITED
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17 Stanhope Street, GLASGOW

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Warwick House, Fort Street, BOMBAY

BLACKIE & SON (CANADA) LIMITED
TORONTO

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"FRIGHTFULLY TRICKY," COMMENTED PAM

Page 42

Frontispiece

CAMILLA'S CASTLE

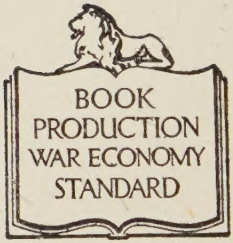
BY

E. E. COWPER

Author of "The Island of Secrets"
"The White Witch of Rosel" &c.

Illustrated by Roger Oak

BLACKIE & SON LIMITED
LONDON AND GLASGOW



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CAMILLA'S CASTLE

CHAPTER I

The Carmichael Girls

"Well, where is she?" demanded Mrs. Carmichael, looking more alert than she had seemed for weeks, "it was Cam's idea in the first place and now something has come of it, it's only fair she should hear this letter."

"Just one word, Mummy," said Pam, in a wheedling voice. "Is it nice? D'you think it will really be what we planned?"

"Not a word till Cam comes," answered the mother of the whole party, in a firm voice; but she smiled, and her smile was promising.

On that Pamela went out into the narrow passage and shouted "Cam!" with great vigour, whereupon Bethia Parbury, the one servant, looked out from the small kitchen at the end of the passage, her large forehead shining with the frequent application of yellow soap, and said in her respectful voice:

"Las' time I see Miss *Cam* she was down the garden,"

began Bethia, and then someone looked over the rail at the stair-top and said:

"Do you mind 'hushing', Pam; Baby has only just got off to sleep, she's tired with this heat and dusty wind. By the way," here the voice dropped to a lower tone and whispered, "anything exciting, Pam?"

"Rather, my dear," came from Pamela on the lowest step of the stairs. "A letter by the twelve o'clock post, and Mum wants me to rake in Cam before she gives us the whole news; you see it was Cam's idea in the first place—the advertisement I mean—and now something seems to have turned up—look here, Di, can't you come down too?"

Claudia—alias young Mrs. Osmond, for she was married and the eldest of the family—turned her pretty head towards the bedroom door at her back and held up a finger.

"You *can*," said a chirpy voice from within the room, "I'll let you, Mummy."

"D'you promise, Ju?" asked Claudia.

"Oh, yes! You go, Mummy; Auntie Pam, you get her."

"All right, darling," retorted Pam, a staunch ally of June—who couldn't go to sleep. When you are aged between four and five it is pleasant to have an aunt of thirteen full of keen sympathy and very inventive. "Come on, Di, don't waste the shining hours. Bethia has collected Cam, here she is. I *say*, Camilla, the whole place has been yelling for you."

"What a barefaced lie," said Camilla, in a perfectly

friendly tone, "only you. I was cleaning out the chicken house, and of all putrid jobs! I do think you and Pen are the lowest form of animal life to sit in the cool and then call *me* names when I'm "

"We are—we are—we are," allowed Pam, in a placating manner, "honestly, I was just coming when the postman shot a letter in, and when I saw the foreign stamp I got dizzy. Don't let's argue any more, Mum read it and the look of her mouth was frightfully hopeful. Come on, Di; we're all here now, you see we couldn't sort of get down to business till you came, because it was you who invented the advertisement and put us up to the whole dream-like job."

Camilla, seventeen, a tall slim girl with ivory pale skin, imaginative brown eyes, and black eyebrows darker than her bobbed hair, was soothed, or else perhaps she wanted to "get down to business", as Pamela called the situation.

"All right," she said; "you coming down, Di? If it's decent we can call ourselves blessed, for really the stuffiness of this—hum, domicile makes one want to go about in a gas-mask."

Five minutes after that, the four girls were collected round their mother, all four sitting on the floor, prepared to listen in various moods of thrilled hope and expectation.

Claudia was, naturally, the least anxious, because she was more detached; but, as having more knowledge of her mother's difficulties, she was if anything more eager for something to happen that should make life

more pleasant and lighten a load that had been heavy for years.

Mrs. Carmichael was not old, but she had married a sailor at an early age, had seven children, and been left a widow while they were all young.

Claudia married a sailor when she was eighteen, next to her came a brother in the navy. Then Camilla. Then a boy on the training-ship; after him Penelope, Pamela, and Marcus, who was eight and the youngest. Four girls, three boys, and little enough money to cover hundreds of expenses.

Claudia, left at home with her small child when the ship left for a foreign station, joined forces with her mother to help carry the family burden. They took "Hillside", a singularly ugly little dwelling on the side of a long straight road in the midlands—nothing to see but fields, hedges, a copse or two, and much dust on roadsides as well as roads! However, the straight ugly little house was very cheap and had enough bedrooms to accommodate the Carmichael family. As Claudia said, there *were* blessings. First Bethia, whose sense of duty was a miracle in an age when it is seldom obvious.

Other blessings there were, but these grew rather thin when hot days sat on the little flat house-front, and charabancs whirled by in a constant stream, covering every dull little shrub with white powder. Altogether, the family had indeed to be a very cheerful and courageous one not to complain. Not one member of it did, by the way, from Mrs. Carmichael, brave

and smiling after years of trouble, to June Osmond, trying to go to sleep in a little room where no air cooled the stuffiness and flies " did whizz ", as she truly said.

As for the girls, they discovered jokes and joy in the most unlikely directions, and at this particular moment would not have exchanged fates with anyone, because the whole thing was so *odd*, as well as so exciting.

It began with Cam's imagination, and the advertisement that had been put in a certain widely read paper. The advertisement was as follows:

" Romantic family require habitable ancient castle in any part of Europe, preferably on sea; limited income," and the name of the paper with a number only.

The paper was informed of Mrs. Carmichael's address, of course, and instructed to forward possible letters.

Several days had passed without result, and now a letter had been forwarded. There is no need to try to describe the family thrill.

Mrs. Carmichael opened the thin envelope, glanced up and down the letter, and became absorbed.

" Oh, *Mummy!*" cried Pam, in a reproachful voice, " won't you read it out loud?"

There was silence for seconds. Claudia went round to the back of her mother's chair, gazed at the sheets of paper, and said:

" It's in English, and kind of schoolroom sentences.

Oh, I *say*—what an awfully pretty name, like a novel," then she too was silent.

" Mummy, *please* tell us," implored Penelope, who was fourteen, too thin and too white altogether, with brown eyes that looked too large.

" Oh, darlings—I'm so sorry. I was trying to piece it all together and understand. She's a girl, Etoile de Ruvigny, and she writes for her mother to say they want to let their home, an old castle with only one big tower left in good repair. It is called ' Le Camp Geffroy ' or ' Le fief Geffroy ' and is supposed to have been built by a certain Prince Gudfried, which means ' La paix de Dieu '—the ' Peace of God ', somewhere about the year 900. This Gudfried was the son of a certain King Regnar who came from the north, and Gudfried received a fief from Charles the Bald on the coast of Gaul. The girl wants to impress all this on us, you see, to show how old the castle is! Of course it's all legend—but——"

" Oh, Mummy," murmured Pam in a heartfelt whisper, " how utterly different from Hillside—just *think!*"

" We fail to think," said Cam, " it baffles our brain. Mother, is it on the sea, it *would* be, naturally, one hopes."

" Oh yes, children, on the top of a cliff from which you can get down by steps made in the rock. The cliff is a point driving out into the sea—with a little cove called La Tasse—the cup, you see—at one side.

" There is a village—and a hamlet, called Le Grand

Colin, and Petit Colin and all sorts of weird Celtic remains and ruins. A long creek down which a stream runs out to sea and the ruined chapel of Ste. Magloire."

There was a pause as Mrs. Carmichael glanced back and forth over the paper.

" She seems to be a highly superstitious damsel—no wonder—brought up there. Here's something about fairies dancing at the full moon—she called them ' Les Tuzets '—and ' les Déhusets ', and she says St. Augustine said they were Dhus i gou, which means ' spirits of the dead, or goblins of the deep '. But you chicks mustn't get carried off your feet by wild old stories."

" All the same it makes this heavenly ruin fifty times more interesting," suggested Camilla, her brown eyes full of smouldering excitement.

" Especially if it's all bunkum," added Pamela, twisting her pretty nose and mouth with a little grimace of scorn.

" Oh, you *do* think it's bosh and bunkum then, Pam?" put in Penelope, rather pale, her mother thought, so *she* continued firmly:

" Certainly. Ancient superstitions," declared Mrs. Carmichael firmly.

" Mum dear," said Claudia in what the girls called her married voice, " we shall *have* to have this house."

" *Castle!*" cried Pam and Pen with one shout.

" Certainly castle, and certainly we take it without one blink of hesitation," added Camilla. " It is the

luck of a lifetime. Mummy, is it fearfully expensive? Is it possible to take it? Because you know we're *all* sensible. And we all admit freely that if one can't one can't. If you haven't got the money to do it, we must just make up our minds—we shan't grouse, you know."

Three pairs of dark eyes in shades of hazel and brown gazed at Mrs. Carmichael. She knew well enough that no one would "grouse"; those daughters of hers had been tried again and again in a very hard school, but they never failed.

"It will be all right," she said, and smiled at the anxious eyes.

"It shall be all right," agreed Claudia, feeling immensely proud of herself and her little saved-up nest-egg in the bank.

"Journeys?" questioned Pam anxiously.

Mrs. Carmichael was reading the letter again.

"They don't ask much, poor dears," she told her family. "They are badly off, she and her mother, and they propose to move out to some place close by in order to make a little money. She says she knows it is inconvenient—no range, no hot water pipes, no bathroom, and very shabby furniture, so they only ask—look here, Di darling—we can manage *that*, can't we—francs, how much is it?"

Claudia got up, went round and looked at the letter, then she frowned and made "sums", as Pam called the calculations, tapping her fingers on the chairback near her mother's head.

" Right-o, Mummy darling. Can-do! Tell the girl ' yes without fail ', by return of post, and we'll all go down and buy a twopence halfpenny stamp—and clinch it, before any other people with romantic minds snatch the place from us. Oh, I *say*, just listen to that bell," and Claudia rushed from the room to check Bethia in her vigorous ringing of the dinner bell on the passage table.

A voice answered apologetically:

" Miss June's not asleep 'm. She ast me over the stairs for Mrs. Mac and the kittens, so I took 'em up."

Sounds of singing interrupted at this point. June was chanting a hymn at the top of her voice, " Onward, Christian soldiers " mingled with words invented as she went on and bringing in the passing events touching Mrs. MacStinger, the tabby cat, and her lively family.

As Pam said, June's hymns grew into oratorios; there was much truth in the criticism.

The oratorio was in full swing, plainly, but the manly voice ceased suddenly, and June smiled in her seraphic manner as her mother entered.

" I'm not naughty," she explained, " all these people wanted to stay wiv me, so I let them. An' besides it was most fee-ar-fully hot, Mummy—I was all sticky."

" Suppose we get ready for dinner," interrupted Claudia, " if we make too much noise and too many bangs we shall frighten the kitties, they *are* so young."

June was very fresh and well behaved when the

family collected in the little stuffy dining-room. At once she detected the thrill of excited joy that seemed to pervade all her relations, and gazed from one to the other with large, soft inquiring eyes.

Mrs. Carmichael and Claudia settled numberless details about the move, and the younger members of the party watched and listened to every word, rather awestricken by the thought of amazing things happening—the sort of things Camilla put into the stories she told.

" Frightfully nice, of course," as Pen said, " but not the least real; story-book niceness to story-book people; but *this* time it's going to happen to us—real things to live people."

" I feel as though we were sitting in a dream," Pam told her, as they strolled down to the little gate after dinner. " Oh, look, Pen, and remember that in a tiny wee bit of time we shall hear waves on rocks, and see extraordinary new loveliness."

" *I* see and I perfectly appreciate the whole business," allowed Pen, " but d'you know I've rather a feeling in my bones that we may—possibly—have—well—bothers!"

" You have," said Pam anxiously, " don't give way to it, my good child. Sit on your feelings. All the same, wherever we go, and whatever we do, we are bound to get bothers mixed with life."

" We are," allowed Pen, " *the* point is to get all the niceness we can, and turn our backs on the rest. You're bound to get through if you refuse to be downed."

" Besides," added Pam, giving little jumps where she stood, " the downing of bothers is rather fun in itself, *I* think. You don't want life to be one large sugar cake, do you?"

" No," agreed Pen, " all the same, you wait."

CHAPTER II

The Camp of Gudfried "Peace of God"

There was not much "waiting" about that transaction in spite of four girls, more if you count Bethia and June, watching for posts as cats watch for birds! That is apt to make time go slow. But in this case letters ran to and fro at such a pace that the business was put through and settled in about ten days. Not only that, Hillside was "let" for a low rent to two kindly women who actually liked it, as they called the charabancs "life", had relations in the town, and looked on the white road as "country".

Camilla said how fortunate it was that people had different tastes, after which Pen snubbed her by murmuring "stale remark"! There might have been sharp words, but Pamela suddenly cried:

"People! Only four days now, and *then*——"

There were no words. How could anybody do what Bethia called "bicker", when they allowed themselves to realize fully what was going to happen in four days!

The family lived in a whirl. Not so much packing

as throwing out what they could not pack, and deciding what they really must take. A most difficult thing when it came to what Pam called a " party of people ", and a real necessity for limiting luggage. However, somehow it added to the joy of life in these very special circumstances, and in good time everything was complete, even to the labels on the boxes—as few, by the way, as they could possibly do with.

Nothing would be gained by telling the exact details of those final days and the actual journey. Mrs. Carmichael was a traveller of experience, so was Claudia, and to a certain extent Camilla, though she had been through it all when she was too young to appreciate it. The rest of the family had been tied by the fact of its numbers to one place mostly. Numbers and want of money will often nail people to a place they don't like, as we all know! Lucky the folk who find themselves planted in loveliness at least, even when they miss other things they like!

In this case no one even suggested anything further than the joy of Le Camp Geffroy, and nobody asked for more than a reasonable share of fine weather, because everything else was included in the picture.

The day came—fine! The party left Hillside baking in the sunshine of a cloudless day in May, drove to Lower Framfield in a motor-bus, and arrived at the London terminus in good time to catch the boat train. Stowed away comfortably with plenty of room, because it was early days, before the public thought of holidays, the Carmichael party ate lunch hungrily, feeding Mrs.

MacStinger and the two kittens meanwhile. The rest of the kittens, with the chickens, had been adopted by Miss Clark and Mabel Clark, the kindly ladies who found their hearts' desire in Hillside. Everything like that had panned out in an amazingly neat and comfortable way.

Bethia said:

" Well, you see, Miss Cam, it *was* to be," adding, " Mother says I'd better pack the mincing-machine; she says they're mostly short of butcher's meat in foreign parts, and the mincing makes a little go a long way."

Camilla agreed, " keeping a straight face "—as Mrs. Parbury would have called an effort to restrain giggles —with difficulty.

" We shall have lots of fish, Bethia," she suggested.

" That's as may be, miss," rejoined Bethia, who was not inclined to be too hopeful about food prospects, " but it stands to sense they're bound to eat something."

So the mincing-machine was not left for Miss Clark, and Bethia's mind was relieved. Mrs. MacStinger was taken, because Bethia was sure there would be rats, and the two kittens to bear her company. Pamela carried the basket and all went well, especially when the family discovered that the presence of Mrs. Mac kept June and Marcus happy when otherwise they might have found the hours rather long.

The details of that journey need not be described, nor the arrival. Those who have done it know what

happens, and those who have not will be more interested in the place to be reached, and that amazing castle in which so many queer happenings were to take place.

One thing after another conveyed the party on its way, till at last they found themselves getting out of a motor vehicle shaped like a small charabanc on the side of a down, the road being but a grass track along which they had rocked and swung on their perilous way towards the strange pile of grey stone building that stood up oddly clear and grand against a background of sea as blue as the cloudless sky.

They had not passed through any village, but the driver told them that Le Grand Colin lay to the back of the down on the slope to the creek of Ste. Magloire, and Le Petit Colin was but a fishing hamlet down on the shore of the river.

It was obvious that the castle stood by itself on a bluff of cliff jutting into the sea, had no road to it except the wheel track over the heath, and no other building in view.

Camilla had been gazing for minutes, her heart in her eyes, but quite silent, while the rest of the party gave out little cries of joy or amazement, and Pen made little sobs as she drew in her breath, tears on her long lashes.

Bethia remarked:

" Goodness gracious me, there ain't not one chimney! However do they get along with the fires?"

To which Marcus answered, as one well acquainted with baronial castles:

" The smoke comes into the rooms and out of the windows, I guess, but we needn't worry in hot weather."

They drew up at the edge of a drawbridge that lay across a chasm in the cliff, striking down and down into a place of rocks where surging water seethed and swept as the tides rose and fell.

" Oh, gemini!" gasped Claudia, glancing at the holes in the ancient planks of the bridge. " Come here, Baby darling! Marc, look where you step."

" I *say*," cried out Pam joyously, " it's *the* most spiffing place I've ever beheld. Mum, dear, look, it absolutely *reeks* with danger!"

" So I see," agreed Mrs. Carmichael, in a resigned voice, " you children must look where you are going, that's all."

Pamela passed an arm round her mother's slim figure. " This is dangerous all right, but the holes are not big enough to let anything through except people's legs. *Do* come along, Di, d'you see there's a portcullis? Just look at those great spikes up in the arch."

Everyone looked and drew in breaths of speechless thrill, for beyond the drawbridge was a gateway beneath which a deep dark arch led through into a court that was grass-grown. In the roof of the arch was a deep groove from which the portcullis showed in all its savage strength and queer barbaric suggestion. Beyond that shadow of fierce defence lay the bright green grass in the court and sunshine dancing on the bright gay green, and the lovely ochre grey of the stone.

Staring at the arriving party stood a short square little woman—a person in black with so many pleats in the hips of her short skirt that she seemed as wide as she was high. She had a brown face with red cheeks, and very black eyes set close to her nose. It was a cheerful face, yet there was something in it that was suspicious and rather too watchful. She came forward through the archway and offered to carry parcels at once, speaking to Mrs. Carmichael in a French that carried rather an odd sound with it.

She was Michelle Lemoyne, she said. She lived in Le Grand Colin, but Madame la Comtesse had engaged her as cook years ago and had told her to remain, as she knew the castle and the stove, and it was possible that Madame's servant would not be able to manage at once. She, Michelle, could, of course, depart if Madame did not require her services, presently.

" Of course, Mother dear," put in Claudia eagerly, and the matter was taken for granted.

It seemed to Pen that Mrs. Michelle Lemoyne wore a relieved look at this, perhaps that was natural, for why should she not be glad to keep a situation she knew. In a moment she was helping vigorously, carrying boxes and chattering with the driver in very emphatic tones.

Twenty minutes after that the Carmichael family knew what their home was to be. Around the courtyard rose massive walls with broken battlements where once had been strong defences.

On the left-hand side was a huge massive round

tower which was, as it were, part of the wall and dove-tailed into the rock. It was high enough to hold four stories, with a room on each floor and a narrow stone stair climbing up and up within the wall. The rooms were lighted by loop-holes open to the air and set in walls many feet thick. They had no fire-places, naturally, and were a fair size, but not so large as would be inferred from the outside size of the tower owing to the immense solidity of the walls.

This tower was no doubt the last perfect piece of the original stronghold, and probably dated back to the wild days of King Regnar; it was set in building of a later period, for the walls from which it rose had been repaired and built up with something rather more habitable, and there was the entrance door to which the stout little Madame led the way, trotting in her eagerness. Up several steps to a door—inside a cramped passage, rather shadowy. From this opened a good-sized low room with a brick floor, a wide fire-place, and a long deep-set window looking on the courtyard. There were two doors in the wall, leading into two small rooms, obviously used as bedrooms; they had loophole windows in the outside wall and looked out to sea eastward.

Under this living-room, reached by steps was another room—the kitchen—also with a loophole to the east, and a very large complete cooking-stove, the funnel of which went out through a hole in the wall. You will understand that all this was primitive, and Mrs. Carmichael glanced anxiously at Bethia to see how she

took it, but Bethia made no sign either way. Her mother had given her to understand that "foreign parts" were very odd places, and one must never be surprised at odd behaviour on the part of the miserable people who had the bad luck not to be born in England. So Bethia just looked, speechless.

The narrow passage above led at the other end, with a twist, into a fascinating chamber, plainly used as *the* best sitting-room. It had a window looking across the court due south, a big fire-place with a high carved mantel-shelf, no ceiling, and a groined roof. Outside its door a very narrow wooden stair—like steps to a loft—led up to a little low iron-clamped door which was the entrance to the round tower with its stone stair within the wall, and its four largish rooms one above the other.

"Heaps of room," said Claudia hopefully. "Brick room for dining-room and nursery. Groined room for best parlour. Little bedrooms leading out of dining-room for Bethia and Marcus—tower for all of us; Pam and Pen—top floor, Baby and me—Cam by herself, and Mummy to chose first, also by herself. Heaps of room, why, it is a perfect mansion of comfort."

"*Rather!*" cried Pen and Pam, in one urgent breath.

"Where's the cook to be put?" asked Camilla, almost ashamed to suggest a want.

Then it appeared that Michelle was provided for. She showed nice teeth in a happy smile as she explained that her room was close by the kitchen, down the steps, with a window so very pleasant over the sea. It

appeared that Madame Lemoyne always slept in that room, she would show it. Oh, yes, she was used to that room, and it was of the most convenient that she could arise so early and disturb no one.

" I expect it's a cubby hole like Bethia's, looking out the same way with a loophole in the wall," suggested Camilla; " well, let's set to and get tidy by night, later on we can explore the whole place in peace. It will take us days and days—but *oh!*"

" Why that ' oh '?" murmured Pam, who was white with excitement.

" *Why?* Because words simply fail one," said Penelope. " I feel rather choked, the strength, the power, and the ages and ages of life in it all seem to sit on one's head and stifle one's heart. Don't you feel like that, Cam?"

Camilla turned and looked at the younger girl with a startled sort of gaze. Her lovely eyes were wide open.

" I keep thinking of Geffroy, who was Gudfried, which means ' the Peace of God '," she answered, in a low voice. " Just think how he built it all, to stop sea robbers raiding the villages most likely. He must have been proud of it—and now we are in his tower. The keep, I suppose, and, Mummy, do you see these loopholes command the drawbridge, they could fire on the enemy from here."

" Just think of men in armour holding these stone stairs," said Pen, in a thrilled whisper.

" And think of the frightful noise when they banged

on each other's armour, and large men fell down clattering from top to bottom; perfectly *awful*," added Pam, exaggerating a still more thrilled whisper.

" I think we will all have a kind of lunch tea with the hamper we brought and then set to and do our rooms. Mummy must lie down and then——"

" Certainly not," contradicted Mummy sharply. " I want to do a hundred things; but let us have a meal first. You must all want it."

That meal was eaten in the big room with a brick floor. June fell asleep and was put to bed on the wide window seat with cushions and a shawl. Marcus was pressed into service as a carrier, much against his will, and all the sisters worked like navvies, feeling, as Pam said, " like somebody else " the whole time.

" One cannot realize Hillside and the white road, the chickens and the motor-bus," she declared, " *I* can't. One looks out and sees the gulls crying round the battlements and hears the sea swishing far away down among rocks—it's all so utterly paralysing. Next we shall see knights and ladies walking in the court."

" We are only just beginning too," Pen reminded her, " we've got everything to find out to-morrow. The whole place is a network of secrets."

They were making their beds—comfortable " box " beds with old oak frames—when this conversation took place. They had come up the ladder steps with arms full of sheets and oddments, hot and dusty, and then stood still looking round.

" One thing that strikes one is the silence," said Pen, " at Hillside one heard a fly cough, and if anyone sat down on a chair the house creaked. Here, it's gulls and wave ripples. Pam, the thickness of these walls makes one feel dazed."

" I know, of course, but have you noticed what happens when the ladder steps come up to the tower door?" asked Pam.

" What? Do you mean how rough it is, all ruins and jumbled-up stones?"

" There's a passage inside the walls; I expect it goes right round. Probably if we went round towards the drawbridge we should find a way clean round the whole courtyard and back to this tower. Don't you think, Pen, it must have been made for the defenders to shoot through slits from inside, or pour boiling stuff down on men outside?"

" My dear girl, if the drawbridge was up, there is the chasm bang down to rocks, then the cliffs and the sea round three sides. I should have thought boiling water would be wasted—when you think——"

Penelope paused, she was thinking a great deal and seeing pictures a long way back.

Said Pamela in a convinced voice:

" They must have used all sorts of things, otherwise why did they want a passage inside these walls? Oh, Pen, what walls and what times to live in, and here we are—so—so—well *nothing* could happen to us. It's all so correct nowadays, isn't it?"

Pen sat on the edge of her tidy bed and gazed

dreamily across the white room and through the deep recess of the loophole window at the sky.

"I don't know," said Pen, "in a way of course; but people do have adventures you know, Pam, even now. I don't mean boiling oil and shooting bolts through loop-holes. All the same, in such a place as *this*——"

Penelope paused and Pam looked at her questioningly. Then they both strolled over to a loop-hole, climbed up into the deep recess and sat together gazing at the most amazing view they had ever seen. Point after point of rocky or wooded coast that swept around in a vast curve fading away into blueness. Spurs of rock running out along yellow sands and rippling muttering water, withdrawing itself out and out till acres of those sands lay shimmering in the sun. Through the sands to the north ran the bed of the river that came down between the cliffs of Ste. Magloire, and the girls knew that in the blue depths of the gorge sheltered the hamlet called Le Petit Colin, also the fishing boats. As they looked, entranced with the view, they saw a boat on the stream. It was white, with one reddish-coloured lug-sail, also it was a slim graceful little craft with well-shaped bows, and a long counter—not a cut-off square stern. It was cleverly managed, though the girls that watched did not understand how clever it was to tack down and out from the narrow river against the soft southerly breeze blowing from the sea.

"Look," said Pamela eagerly, "it's a girl—only one girl—no sailor! Oh, I say, Pen, see how she turns and

then turns. I should have thought it was quicker to go straight."

" Can't go straight because of the wind being against her—don't they call that tacking? Gemini! what a perfect duck of a boat, and doesn't she look smart! Fancy a girl *quite* alone."

The sisters watched enthralled till the slim white boat reached the shallow sea that met the river, and the red sail ran out and out towards the first point where the woods came down. Then their attention was drawn by Camilla's voice calling vigorously:

" Come down, come down, you deaf adders, everybody is having lunch."

CHAPTER III

A Queer Discovery

Now Marcus was late for the meal, and when he did appear his shining cleanliness was sufficiently noticeable to draw attention from his critical family.

Said June:

" Uncle Marc, ve hairs all wet."

It was, and streaked backward by vigorous efforts of a hard brush into wet grooves.

" It's rude to make personal remarks," Di rebuked her child firmly; " it's quite right for people to come to dinner nice and clean."

" I don't call vis dinner," retorted June, changing the subject, as she opened her mouth unnaturally wide for the reception of a heaped teaspoonful of egg and bread-crumbs. " When can I have my tea?"

" This is dinner and tea," answered Claudia, " soon you'll go to bed and wake up very busy."

" I shall. When I wake up I'll go in ve black place where Uncle Marc goes, filfy dirty vat place."

June would have said more, but her mother checked the flow of information and Marcus recovered his

normal colour. He had grown very pink, so much so that Pen and Pam felt sure he had been investigating and was a little uncertain as to whether he had been exceeding what was permitted. They said nothing however, because it was exactly what they wished to do themselves.

"I expect that's a fearfully deep well in the courtyard," said Marcus with a praiseworthy effort to change the subject, "Bethia says she doesn't mind a well. They have one in her home, in the garden. She's going to let me wind up the bucket pretty often, because we've got no taps and not one single drop of water except the well. We can't have lots of baths, anyway."

"We can bathe in the sea," said Pam promptly, "that's good enough for any ordinary clean person."

"We don't know how to get down to the sea yet," put in Pen.

"I do," Marcus interrupted eagerly, then added, turning red again, "I mean I saw the way."

"I thought perhaps you might have been exploring, dear child," said Mrs. Carmichael in her reasonable voice, "we all want to know the best way to get down; only be careful at first, because one realizes it must be pretty dangerous."

"Rather," agreed Marcus warmly, whereupon Pam telegraphed inquiries with her expressive eyebrows, and Pen looked from one to the other, fully appreciating that there was much behind, not to be lightly revealed to the general public.

After that everybody discussed the tower and rejoiced in their bedrooms, though Claudia felt sure they would be obliged to have little oil-stoves at times. If you can picture a room of grey stone, of course unpapered, with a high groined ceiling, tall narrow windows, unglazed, set in deep recesses, and no fireplaces, you will surely feel that Mrs. Osmond had right on her side.

"Beautifully healthy to have no windows—I mean no glass," said Camilla, with a little twinkle in her lovely eyes, "but it may be cold at moments, and windy, when one thinks of——"

"Don't let's think—let's simply *feel*," said Pam. "And that reminds me, I saw a girl in a boat, like—like—like a silver fish, and it had a little red sail like a huge fin—a lug-sail it's called, isn't it, Di?"

Claudia nodded the while she cut a good-sized piece of cake into fingers for her hungry daughter.

"I saw her too," she said; "she knows her job, anyway."

"I wish we had a boat," said Marcus.

"My dear boy, we've jolly well got enough without boats," Pamela snubbed him briskly, "time enough to think of them in a month. What about the castle? We've got to find out that first, and think of the shore and the caves—the whole place! It would last us a year to start with."

No one said more about the girl in the boat just then. There was a general feeling that to discuss her was disloyal to the castle and rather ungrateful to the mother

of the family, who had done so much to give them this rare treat. After all, as Pen emphasized, a boat is nothing much, but this amazing castle was their own for the time being. Moreover, they were all agreed.

After that nondescript meal people dispersed to various kinds of work. Claudia and Cam arranged the sitting-room with the groined ceiling, Mrs. Carmichael, who was tired, looking on with June and Mrs. MacStinger. Bethia in the kitchen with Michelle Lemoyne listened and looked, learning some things and despising others.

Thus was everyone busy but Pen, Pam, and Marcus, the latter intent on getting hold of his special sisters with a view to their enlightenment about certain matters that were uppermost in his mind.

Now let it be said at once that Marcus was not quite the ordinary boy of nine. Pam had a great respect for his powers, in all sorts of ways, and Pen said he had " vision ", but could not quite explain what she meant by that. Neither of them, then, was surprised when he let them leave the dining-room, as they called the big low room over the kitchen where they had meals; let them leave it and go off to their tower without making any suggestion, but presently followed, flying up the stone stairs with cat's-paw stealthiness. Arrived outside the low, deep-set, stone archway of the door, he opened it two inches, and began:

" I say, Pam!"

" What?" inquired his sister's voice from within the room.

" D'you want to see where I went before dinner?"

Pen opened the door wide.

" Why are you mysterious?" she asked. " Pam and I are sitting up in the window, it's too divine for words."

Marcus looked at the window and at Pam jumping to the floor.

" What's up—in particular, my lad?" she asked. " I saw by your eye there was something more or less exciting on foot."

" Don't talk too loud," requested her brother, glancing back towards the stair.

" My good *child!*" Pen pounced on her offending brother briskly, " considering the whole place has walls half a mile thick, why do you behave as though we were in Hillside where you hear a pin drop next door? One could fire a gun off up here, I believe, and no one know, except the boats on the water. Do let's be sensible."

" If you are sensible you'll be jolly careful—about things—in this castle," retorted Marcus darkly, and he looked at Pamela with meaning. She was the sister who usually met him half-way and never laughed at his imaginative flights.

" Truly, Marc?" she asked, dropping her voice.

" I should just think so—well, you wait. It's no earthly use starting off by being case-hardened like Pen; narrow minds get nowhere."

Penelope flushed pink. In her secret heart she thought Marcus oddly clever for his age, and so he was, very

clever where his interest was roused and possessing intuitive perception of the motives and aims of other people that was correct certainly nine times out of ten. The girls knew this well enough and among themselves were inclined to quote his opinions, though, as Pen said, " it didn't do to let him know that ". Because of this truth, she felt small at being called " case-hardened and narrow ".

" Proof of the pudding is in the eating," she retorted sharply.

" Stale proverbs are feeble," said Marcus shortly.

" Don't let's bicker, dear friends," put in Pam, " both of us want to see the places Marc found. We want to see all we can see now. The others are busy; do let's go. One loathes exploring in a family regiment, but we three can see it really nicely. Come on, Pen, we two will follow where Marc leads."

" And we'd better tie up our heads," suggested Pen, in the elder sisterly tone she assumed at moments, " Marc was simply filthy before dinner, and we really can't afford to wash our heads before we go to bed—there wouldn't be any hot water, considering June's bath and the gallons wanted."

" Besides," began her brother—and checked speech significantly.

" Besides what?"

" You wait and see, my good girl. If I told you now you'd only jeer yourself quite hoarse. Later on perhaps you won't be so cocksure. Come on, Pam."

Pen answered nothing to this. She realized that

Marcus had a reason behind these odd hints. Whether a bad or good reason remained to be revealed, but she found the situation very interesting.

In a moment she was tying up her head and neck in a scarf twisted neatly, while Pamela followed her example. Thus protected they crept down the winding stone steps till they came to the little platform from which the wooden steps led to the narrow corridor and the low-arched doors of the living-rooms on the ground floor.

At the top of the wooden steps Marcus boldly left the little platform and entered on his journey through the amazing width of the wall. There was a hole both ways, to the right and to the left, a rough—very rough —broken tunnel, wide or narrow according to the size of the stones pulled out. Sometimes it was a squeeze to get past projecting bits of masonry, sometimes it was quite an arch through, because large lumps of stone had become dislodged and fallen on the ground, so that it was necessary to climb over the obstruction. Equally, it was almost dark at times, and then lighted in fitful splashes where loophole slits had been broken in the wall.

Marcus went ahead with sure footing, then Pam, jumping over masses of broken masonry and enjoying herself much. Then Pen, shuddering at the spider webs black and thick with the dust of ages and the bodies of insects that had come through the loopholes. As for the spiders who lived in the corners, undoubtedly the less said the better if you wished to be happy, but

Penelope did ask Pam whether she had noticed that they were " about as big as kittens ", and argued for her accurate description when Pam said they couldn't be.

" A spider that has been growing since William the Conqueror would be quite as big as that," retorted Pen firmly, " I should think a castle like this must be *full* of them."

" Hush," ordered Pam.

That was afterwards, of course. While they were going through it, they had no time for arguments, and as the Red Queen said in *Alice*, it took all the running they could do to stop in the same place; for a great extent there was truth in this, for the journey took up much energy and caused various bumps and bruises, apart from dirt and destruction.

Had it not been for the loop-holes this excursion would have been impossible, they served also the purpose of showing where the explorers had come to.

Suddenly Pam checked, and drew up by a loophole that was larger and less broken than those they had passed hitherto.

" I say, Marc," she said in a low voice, " this isn't the straight wall of the rampart, it is curved. There must have been another tower here, like ours, only it's all been smashed up. What a pity!"

" I guess there was once a tower at each corner," suggested Pen eagerly, " And you could get the whole way round inside the wall, as well as doors and

stone stairs up to each from the courtyard. Marc, did you come as far as this, when you got round before?"

"Rather! You wait—we are only beginning! I'll bet this old place got pounded from the sea sometime, it's right on the front. Come and see out of this loophole."

Pen drew in her breath with a hiss of amazement or rapture, or both. They were in what must have once been a room, with the deep, narrow loophole looking out to sea ahead of the vista of points and bays that ran along the coast. It was scenery to dream of, and the base of this tower appeared to dovetail by wonderful masonry into the cliff, which again fell sheer to the seaweed-covered rocks and the water that sucked softly around the outside edges, lifting the brown trails of weed lazily.

"But how did they—how can *we* get out?" questioned Pam, opening her eyes as she gazed. "Is there a way down?"

Her brother answered this anxious question by speeding off down a stone stair in the wall which appeared to be identical in size and pattern with the stair in their bedroom tower, but instead of ending in that wooden ladder within the wall, it was stopped by a very narrow and low archway wherein was set a heavy little door clamped with iron bars. It will be remembered that the other tower had a like doorway opening on to the ladder—so it seemed that all the towers were reached—or guarded—on the same

principle. Such a doorway could be easily defended, you see, in the days when dwellings were looked upon as fortresses.

This little massive door opened inwards and revealed rather a terrifying outlook—irregular steps down the face of the cliff, in fact. There was a slight protection in the way they were hacked out in a sort of zigzag *groove*, leaving a small barrier or rim of rock on the outside, which was helped here and there by bits of stone set into the main cliff. Thus there had been formed a rough balustrade on the outer side, not visible from the sea at all, because the cliff appeared flat as the steps went down sideways, that is to say, across and across the face of the perpendicular cliff, and the scoop of this zigzag was concealed by the edging of irregular rocks.

" Frightfully tricky," commented Pam, gazing downward, " you couldn't see this way up till you reached it, unless you knew about it, of course."

" I guess people know; naturally they're bound to," added Pen, giving a little shiver.

" Oh, they do," said Marcus.

The two girls looked at him.

" What are you hinting at?" asked Penelope, as they drew back within the door and closed it gently.

" I'm not hinting, my good idiot," Marcus retorted, as he raised his eyebrows with a sort of deprecating pity for the foolishness of unreasonable girls, " I'm simply saying they *do* know, and what's more they *use* it."

Both the girls spoke at once.

Pen said:

" They don't—why should they?"

Pam asked:

" Are you sure, Marc; how do you know?"

Marcus leaned his back against the wall and looked at their troubled faces.

" I know, because I saw them," he answered.

" Them! More than one?" cried Pen.

" Shut up—don't yell!" admonished her brother sharply.

" But they're not there now—we've just looked," argued Pen.

" That's all you know about it," Marcus glanced up the narrow stair down which they had come, " look here, you two, will you swear on your sacred word not to say a word to Mum if I tell you what I saw before dinner? It's no use pestering her just when she gets here, and is tired—besides, there may be nothing in it, only it's a queer way of behaving in a civilized country. I mean it's not the sort of thing one does in another person's house, or castle——"

" What isn't?" asked Pen eagerly.

" Getting into it on the sly, of course, my dear girl. People don't unless they want to imitate cat burglars."

" Who were they, Marc?" demanded Pam, her large eyes looking anxious, " but of course strangers, you couldn't know them yet."

" I knew one. That beast of a cook, Madam

Thingummy, who is left here by the Countess—and that's why I said 'hush' outside your bedroom, Pen. Now perhaps you see I've got some sense! It was like this—I went along the wall passage before dinner, well, in the morning. Once or twice I thought I heard a scrambly noise behind, but supposed it was rats. I went into the room above here and sat up in the loop-hole to look out. Somebody passed the door and went down—and just then I heard another person coming up—outside. I couldn't see the steps on the cliff—you can't unless you hang out—so I went and crawled a few steps down the stairs, and there were two people in the arch of the doorway, and because they didn't talk English and whispered awfully fast I couldn't make it out. I saw one, she was that fat pig of a cook—the minute I saw her I knew she was a liar, her face is like a plate with black currants in it for eyes."

"Oh, Marc, poor woman," expostulated Pam, stifling giggles, "she can't help her face. None of us can help our faces!"

"She jolly well can help her expression," said Marcus with decision, "people's souls make their expression, everyone knows that who thinks, and expression is more important than features."

"Mum says she's a splendid cook," murmured Penelope anxiously.

"You bet she is, wicked people can cook awfully well when they put their brains into it," answered Marcus, speaking as one possessing large knowledge

of the subject. "I never said she was stupid, I said she hasn't got an honest soul, and that it shows in her face. Lots of dishonest people are clever—too clever. Besides it stands to sense she'd do her best to be kept here, if she's up to bad tricks."

"Who was the other one?" asked Pam, a frown wrinkling her pretty forehead.

"Don't know who she was, but she was different. The cook called her Mamselle and her voice was awfully soft—rather a jolly voice. I guessed she was only a girl, but one couldn't see, because she was almost outside. They whispered for ages, then she went, and when the cook shut the door I streaked up the steps and crowded into the loophole; there was no other place in the room you could hide a worm in. She went running up and along with all her might; considering it was nearly dinner time I rather wondered at her cheek, but probably she got Bethia to do it all! Well, now you know why I said 'hush'. You've jolly well got to keep your eyes peeled where that female is concerned—but who her friend is—well——"

There was a pause, then Pen said, in a placating tone:

"It doesn't follow that there is mischief, Marc. She knows everyone in the village, you see, and a person might come up this way with a message who would be shy of walking into the courtyard through the gateway because of us. And, after all, what harm was it if they don't mind the trouble

of these awful steps? What do you think, Pam?"

Pamela drew a pattern with the toe of her shoe, then she said:

"Well, I think I'm rather inclined to agree with Marc. After all, people don't do sly things unless they have something to hide."

CHAPTER IV

What Camilla Planned

It has been recorded that Pen and Pam gave their word to say nothing about what Marcus had seen, so they kept it—as always—and said nothing even to Cam, though she was, as a rule, the recipient of all happenings. She was older—nearly eighteen—she was wise and level-headed. Very clever her sisters thought, because she wrote stories and poems in private and had won prizes. She was also very sympathetic, and it was to her they owed the idea of advertising for a ruined castle, and, what was almost as important, had persuaded Mrs. Carmichael that *she*, Camilla, could take all necessary work, which is to say, lessons, for and with Penelope, Pamela, and Marcus.

Cam had been to a well-known school and left it this Easter for good. She was fresh from it, and did not see why she should not teach the other three what she had learned herself. That was what she said to her mother, and the younger ones preferred this plan of education far before Hillside and a daily governess

by the bus from Lower Framfield, which had been their portion so far.

Both Pen and Pam were keen to tell Cam what they had seen, but Marcus would not give way, as he truly said:

"If we do, the whole family will know. Mummy will ask Bethia, and Claudia will tell Baby not to go near those steps. And there you'll be—no secret, no nothing, and we shall never find out what it means."

The girls saw the justice of this, but Pam suggested, very reasonably, that if that was the only way to get down to the sea it would all be public directly, in any case.

"You wait," requested Marcus, so they agreed, knowing that their brother possessed unequalled powers of finesse and diplomacy. He proved that over again on the same evening, when they sat at supper in the big brick-floored room with the setting sun bathing the courtyard and the walls in pink and yellow light.

It was about seven o'clock; everyone was going to bed early so the meal was at seven instead of half-past.

"Mother," said Marcus, looking at her with all expression left out of his very handsome face. He had a way of doing that when he knew he would be watched. "Mother, how do we get to the sea? We can't very well climb down the cliff, or can we? Does Michelle know a path? Would you ask her?"

" I have asked her, darling," said Mrs Carmichael innocently. " We have to go out through the gate, over the drawbridge, and along the heath towards the left—that is to the west, of course. At the end of the chasm—that gap crossed by the drawbridge—the cliff is not so steep, and you go down a roughish path to a perfectly heavenly cove called La Tasse—the cup, you know; it's very sheltered indeed, scooped out of the cliffs in a way there, and along to the west you find glorious sands and rocks, safe bathing, any amount of shells and anemones. It faces almost west, but a point comes round, she says, and keeps it from getting rough seas—as a rule."

" How divine!" murmured Pen and Pam rapturously. Marcus raised his eyebrows very high and asked:

" That's not the way to the village, is it?"

" You go back over the down to the village, but you can reach it by a shorter way if you follow a path to the *right* and go down and down to the shores of the gorge where the river comes through. She says that creek or channel is called Ste. Magloire, because of the tiny old chapel of the name on the top. The village of Petit Colin is on the beach almost—all the boats are there too in shelter—but sometimes in fine weather they anchor in La Tasse cove, because it saves so much trouble; getting down the river appears to be rather a job unless the wind is fair, and if it is quite fair you can't get back easily. Of course I see that."

" The river is where we saw that girl tacking out before dinner," said Pen, " she was awfully clever at it, but, of course, she had the tide with her—hardly any water."

" Girl?" echoed Mrs. Carmichael.

" I saw her," said Cam; " and I had a kind of premonition that she must be the de Ruvigny girl. She came out of the gorge between those wooded cliffs and her boat was silvery white with a red lug-sail. You couldn't mistake her. But you were not looking, Mum dear, just then."

" That was the one," nodded Pam; " she went away right over to the point towards the east when the tide was nearly out, but what happened after we never saw, because the sands were almost dry. She knew her way about, though. She lives here probably."

Everyone agreed and there was a pause.

Then Mrs. Carmichael went on:

" Dear chicks, I have an idea, and I'm sure you will all agree, because you are sensible children."

" Is it going to be perfectly beastly, Mum?" asked Pamela, in her plaintive voice, " because when you tell us how awfully nice we are it often means jam for a pill."

Claudia laughed out loud.

" So she does, but this *truly* is not a pill."

Mrs. Carmichael laughed too, flushed a faint pink, and went on bravely:

" You know the Ruvigny pair, don't you?"

" No, Mummy, we don't," said Penelope softly.

" We know they own this castle, though—is it about them?"

" Michelle says they are living in an ancient windmill on the cliff opposite the Ste. Magloire chapel—or rather ruins."

" *Windmill!*" exclaimed Pen and Pam, with one excited voice.

" You can live in a windmill all right," Camilla informed them; " lots of room if you take away the sails and don't grind, of course. Windmills are *huge*, aren't they, Mum?"

Mrs. Carmichael nodded, not that she was learned on the subject of windmills, but she had been told so by the cook in this case.

" It's called the Prince's Mill, 'Moulin du Prince'," she went on, " and was probably built in after years by the family that owned this castle, to grind their corn for the garrison. Anyway, it belongs to the Ruvigny family now, so mother and daughter have gone to live in it while they let this castle to us. Now you see!"

" Now we see," murmured Cam, thinking of the girl in the silver boat, " but what about them, Mother dear?"

" Well, my plan was to call, make friends, and get the girl—Etoile was her name, wasn't it?—get *her* to come every day, or three days a week, and give you children French lessons, or talk to you—something useful like that. Then, with Cam for English, we can go on peacefully for some time with no school worry

on one's mind, knowing that it would be a help to them as well as a help to us. They need the money—we need the language! There you are. Well, do you agree, will you all three help it along?"

"Of course," agreed Cam eagerly.

"You don't belong," said Pen, "you are the schoolmarm. Mum is asking us three—aren't you, Mummy dear?—and *we* agree; we'll behave ourselves all right, if she's decent."

"I wonder if she'll let us go in her boat," suggested Marcus. "If she does that I wouldn't mind a reasonable amount of swotting; it would be worth the grind."

"I don't know about boats quite," put in Mrs. Carmichael, "sailing is rather a big order, with only one girl, and tides like these, anything might happen."

"That's just what we hope," said Pam, "adventure is the cream of existence. I *say*, what a copybook sentence—how splendid! But truly, Mother, we'll be perfect lambs and do chit-chat in any language you ask for, if you'll give us a boating chance of—well, of doing things that might be exciting."

"We'll see," was the only answer.

"Just as if we were children," commented Pen in a plaintive voice.

There the new idea stopped for the time, but it was understood the Windmill was to be called upon at an early date, and to this the three resigned themselves, though Pam expostulated with:

"Don't jostle your plan along too fast, Mummy,

please remember we only came to-day! We haven't seen the sea yet, except politely at a distance. Don't you think next week would be time to settle up lessons and do calls, and make business arrangements with intelligent school-marms? Cam looks as pale as a crumpet, she wants tons of ozone and freedom. Let us all alone for one joyous week, Mother dear, and you'll find it will pay any amount. We shall be positively getting up before dawn to do lessons."

"I wonder," murmured Mrs. Carmichael with her head on one side. "I expect it will end in next week all the same. Let's go out round the battlements. I want to see the whole place from the walls."

The next half-hour, after the sun went down and light changed and faded, was a vision to dream about in years to come. The sea was coming in over the acres of rippled yellow sands, and the colours of the land points, wooded or rocky, were like jewels.

The party went up by a stair of very small steep steps in the wall by the gate tower. Thus on to a path, quite broad, on the top, guarded by a battlement with embrasures. In many places this was broken down, but it was always obvious what had once been, and from every point of view the beauty of the castle was more and more wonderful—and *grim*.

Said Pamela, when they reached the west corner on the cliff, where the coast stretched out to the sunset and the cove of La Tasse lay far below in soft violet shadow:

" Mother, if I were that de Ruvigny girl I should be a murderess, or something horribly wicked."

" Dear child, why?"

" Fancy having this wonder for one's own and in your family for ages, fancy having to watch it fall to ruin all your life, yet not be able to build it up or save it, or put proper furnishing in it—because of no money. Money! of all common foolish things! It's rather dreadful to see how beauty and grandeur depend on it. In old days the knights and chiefs just took what they needed and *made* places like this—well then——"

" Yes, but they earned it too, Pam," put in Marcus, who was gazing out to sea at the beauty spread below, " they defended all the poor ones from pirates, and gave masses of food to the helpless folk. They got killed the whole time. They didn't fight for money specially, but for the King and their own country. Why, Gudfried had this given to him for the brave things he did! The King or somebody gave it to him, and let him have the land—anyway, *she* said so, and besides he was absolutely a white man—most of those knight's were," added Marcus, feeling he was on very safe ground.

Pam was just going to explain that she meant exactly the same thing, when Camilla checked the flow of excited tongues.

" You are both right and neither wrong, as Mr. Mantalini said in *Nicholas Nickleby*," she remarked placidly, " and to go back to the very beginning of all

things I must say I'm awfully sorry for these de Ruvigny people, and were I the girl Etoile, I should jolly well do—well—most things to keep this dream of a place on its sound foundations. For instance, if *we* find a coffer of priceless jewels, or a few sacks of Spanish doubloons—pieces of eight and so on—we will tell them at once and they can build up the towers and mend the walls, poor dears. That's settled. Mother dear, just look down and see the fishing boats anchored in La Tasse, tide coming in everywhere, probably they are waiting to go out by moonlight when a breeze gets up. By the way, we can't go right round the front battlements, can we, the ruin of this tower rather gets in the way."

That was so. The immense bulge of the walls checked any advance. It appeared there had been a doorway into this tower on the wall, but it had sunk into a shapeless pile of fallen stones, blocks heaped anyhow. You could not get inside from the battlements, though the thought occurred to the younger girls at once that there might perhaps be an entrance from below, or inside! They, of course, had seen how the tower at the east end of the sea rampart was connected with the outside as well as the inside.

So they contented themselves with climbing down by the help of various remains of steps within the walls, and going up again from the courtyard wherever help of that kind was offered. In places there were deeply recessed chambers within the walls, closed by more modern doors—rather like the arches under a railway

bridge. In these shelters were stacked wood for burning and all sorts of lumber like scrap iron, nets, bits of chain and rope, boards and packing cases, apparently nothing came amiss to the owners of Le Camp Geffroy.

The three sisters observed all with intense sympathy, for as Pen said to Pam that night, Hillside, Lower Framfield and the white road were not easy to bear when one was fighting money difficulties every week, but it must be far worse to have the castle in all its grand beauty for your own and nothing to live on.

" I wonder what the girl is like, and how she feels," said Pen, gazing, gazing at the shimmering sea from the loophole.

" And fancy being offered a guinea or two to talk French to boring girls, when you really *want* a million pounds," added Pam. " The sort of thing one could not stand. I couldn't, Pen, I should feel choked, shouldn't you?"

" Perhaps she's got over the choking stage, poor thing. She must be used to it by now. I wonder if she fishes in order to get food to eat. How awful!"

They looked at one another, each thinking of the visitor, and that queer interview Marcus had been witness of.

" I say, Pam," began the elder girl, " you don't think by the ghost of a chance that person Michelle met could have been Etoile?"

Pamela shook her head energetically.

" Oh, *no*, why should it?"

" Well, she was out sailing, we know, and Marc said she spoke in a lady's voice."

" He couldn't know a voice. And why should she come like that? Oh, no!"

" Well, of course that might be her usual way of going up and down when she lives here. We can't tell for certain."

Again they looked at one another uneasily. There was certainly a doubt, and the doubt was an uneasy thing, somehow, it opened up a queer vista of ideas.

" Anyway, I don't trust that woman Michelle," went on Pen.

" I don't either. But her face may not mean so much badness as it looks," answered the younger girl; " odd how often Marc is right about faces."

" Well," Pen gave a loud yawn, " these beds are divine, only one bangs on the footboard when one stretches. I vote we go to sleep now, and in the daytime just watch out. If that girl was Etoile, we shall jolly well find her out when she comes to teach us French, she can't keep on having mysteries with our cook without us finding it out. Don't let's talk any more, Pam, I'm dank with sleep, my brain won't act any more."

Just when Pen and Pam ceased to allow their " brains to act ", someone else's brain was very wide awake.

At the door of the room below stood Camilla, a pair of thick stockings pulled on over her thin ones,

and a dark coat buttoned above a thin frock. In her hands was a dark silk scarf, and she was fidgeting with this as she listened to the low murmur of voices from the room above, broken by the chirping questions in June's piping tones from the room below. The whole world was awake, thought Cam with an impatient sigh, just when she wanted to prove something that had come into her mind when they were exploring the battlements and discovered that the ruins of the sea tower at the western corner were not accessible from outside.

You will understand of course that Camilla did not know that Marcus first, and her younger sisters next, had tried that blackened hole within the wall that was visible from the wooden ladder. She supposed that she herself, Camilla the imaginative, was the only one to suspect a kind of rabbit-run inside and right round the walls. Her fancy had fixed on the opposite way to the one the others had taken. They went along the east wall above the brick-floored room, and stopped at the end where the tumbled remains of part of the eastern sea tower had held them up. Camilla was not so much interested in the east side. She wanted to get inside the gate defence above the drawbridge and the massive arch from which the portcullis hung, and around two sides within the wall beneath the battlements around which they had gone after supper.

There would be a moon, already risen, not full, but useful enough in a clear sky and open scene. She had besides a pocket lamp and felt that without rousing

the curiosity of the family she could investigate quietly certain matters that she wanted to know.

Camilla was very imaginative, as we have said before. Her mind was always running on lines that involved mysteries, thrills, and stories. That, in the first place. She couldn't help it. In the second place, she felt a kind of responsibility about the castle, because it was her idea to find one, and hers also to advertise till it was found! She did not forget either that *she* was now Miss Carmichael and her mother's principal A.D.C. She was back from school for good, yet not allowed to go out and get a job by which to help the family income, because her mother needed her in a score of " wants ", the chief one being to teach her sisters and Marcus, till the latter went to a training-ship and Pen had at least a year at school. Camilla had planned privately to win literary competitions, to write stories, to which end she was studying a book of instructions and practising hard at all she read. One reason why she had been so anxious for this castle experience was to get hold of a *genuine* subject as a centre for stories, or even for a book. Having once got a real scene, she could use her imagination gift and put into her stories anything that came into her head. Why not?

She had told no one at all, and intended to keep the idea and the work to herself till something grew out of her labours. She had arrived at picturing a steady income, not large at first, but *very* useful, flowing in to ease her mother's worry, and send the

two to school—Pen and Pam—one after the other.

Therefore, she decided, it was best to start at once, and then, with such a glorious, peaceful room all to herself for work, she could, quite soon, achieve success and a name.

" Now," she whispered to herself, " now to start."

CHAPTER V

Camilla discovers a Mystery

Silence fell on the tower, each room became as quiet as profound sleep could make tired people. Then Camilla stifled a yawn, she was sleepy herself, and crept down the winding stair, past Claudia's room and Mrs. Carmichael's to that short wooden ladder which had a way of creaking when you most hoped it wouldn't.

Here, of course, she was on a level with the tunnels in the walls, and without hesitation chose the one which had been in her mind, turned to the right, and picking her path cautiously, went towards the entrance gate in the north wall.

She had the same experiences as her sisters in the matter of spiders, dirt, and rough footing. Also, she felt it more unpleasant, because spiders of that kind are worse when surprised by a flashlight gleam, and stockings are more unpleasant to walk in than shoes.

But Camilla decided that *this* was valuable material for her book, so she stared at the spiders and observed exactly how large they were and how they scampered, and stuck it all with hardly a wince.

At the gate room she went up two little steps in a partition wall, and found herself within a small square chamber, very dilapidated, with loopholes commanding the drawbridge to the north, and the courtyard to the south. It was oddly weird, and so still that she believed she heard the rattle of an anchor chain away in the cove of La Tasse. The moon had risen high enough to show up all outlines and shed the faintest silver light wherever her weak beams fell—for she was a young moon.

Camilla, standing in the little low square chamber with its cracked walls and floor—of stone—strewn with rubbish, felt a grip of mystery on her mind. She thought of the long-ago days when this place had been full of men-at-arms, shooting first with bows and arrows, later on with the tough little arbalest, and short thick bolt called a " quarrel ". Later on still, no doubt, with powder and ball, flint and steel, unless the fighting days of the old castle had been over by then. Camilla gazed at the broken walls, her soft eyes wide open as she visioned the men in leather jerkins and steel caps crouching at the loophole slits, and the terrible scenes on the bridge as the enemy tried to storm it if it was down—worse scenes still if it was up, and the besiegers came up from the chasm at low tide—the ladders set against the wall in spite of amazing difficulties, and the dauntless courage of the fighters.

She stood in a dream till again she heard a sound from the sea—a startling sound indeed, for it was like

a girl's laugh—faint and distant, yet what else could it have been?

She ceased to picture " bombards " and " halberds " and all the rest of the clanking arms and forms of " ammunition " that old days must have seen in this battered gate-chamber, and went on her way around. Of the landward west tower little remained but a shell, and she came through, seeing nothing in particular, to reach the west sea tower, outside which they had all been held up earlier in the evening because of its massed ruin.

After searching for a way, Camilla, squeezing through a broken doorway, found that here was a round room corresponding to the one her mother had in the habitable tower. That is to say, it was on a level with the passage in the wall, with a loophole looking out west into La Tasse cove. It appeared to her that the tower must always have been smaller and the rooms more restricted, probably because it was a tower facing seaward, and she wondered if they had been occupied only by men-at-arms of the garrison. Either that, or the walls were thicker. Only this lowest chamber remained, as she knew already, and it was strewn, so far as the moon showed, with wreckage and lumber.

Cautiously Camilla snapped on her torch to examine certain heaps that did not appear to be masonry.

It was odd, because she could not decide what exactly were the things she found. Some longish rolls of cylinder-shape, apparently made up of rolled paper,

like the " pieces " bought to paper rooms with, but not quite so heavy as might be expected. A small stack of these stood on end against the wall, and close by perhaps half a dozen of neat, nailed down cases, packages covered with waterproof stuff. These were very securely done up, and a handy shape, not large. To the touch it would seem there was *wood* beneath the outside wrapping—or possibly tin—anyway something firm and unyielding. They were done up neatly but there was no address to suggest an owner. Yet if they belonged to the castle and the de Ruvigny family, it would seem rather odd that such parcels should be left in such a neglected place. The more Camilla looked at them, the more she felt that they were waiting in connexion with some intention, but what this could be it was not easy to see.

It was just at that thoughtful moment when she heard a girl's voice again, and realized that it was an English voice and a voice with a nice ring.

It said:

" Skipper, do you realize this castle? If not, kindly bring your mind to bear on it. What a place!"

" No time for castles," answered another voice with asperity, " do set the stove going, Pat; you really are a feckless passenger."

The person called " Pat " expostulated in many words.

" *Passenger!* I say, Fred, you really *are* an ungrateful beast, when you know——"

" Don't be abusive, my good child—especially on

a high note," put in another voice. " You'll shock the population. If you kick at the cooking job, come up here and help the Skipper get ship-shape. Nell will do the eggs and bacon."

Laughter followed, sounds of feet on a deck, clatter of blocks, chains, and cheerful chaff.

Camilla crept into the recess of the loophole and looked out into the cove below. She saw by the light of the young moon, rising higher in a clear sky, a small yacht, with one tall mast and a little mast on the graceful stern. She did not know that it was a " yawl " of perhaps seven tons burden, with a particularly pretty " counter " that made the hull look like a seabird with folded wings sitting on the smooth ripple of the rising tide. There was a white light at the mast head, but the sails sliding downward with a rattle and rush fixed her attention so that all other detail was lost at first, especially as three girls were on deck, dealing with the swollen folds and bringing the masses of white canvas into subjection, by wrapping the canvas close to the main boom and lashing it with cordage.

Three girls—and no man to be seen. Presently another girl appeared in the little well of the companion, and standing on the steps asked:

" When will you be ready, fellows?"

It was the voice of " Pat ", so called; Camilla looked eagerly, but could not see what she was like—one cannot distinguish either colour or features, looking downward in the silver pale light of a young moon.

" Half a mo'," said a girl who was lashing down the fore-sail in the bows, " I say, Skipper, need we be *very* particular? I'm so sleepy that I'm holding my eyes open with one hand, and working with the other. Oh, *shut* up, Pat, why do you keep on hacking it?"

" My good sister," retorted Pat, " do you like bacon fried into greasy chips? I don't. Fred, for the thousandth time, come down and do some eating—after that finish this job!"

Plainly " Fred " was a girl, also the " Skipper ". Also the cook girl and the one in the bows were sisters, there was a likeness in the voice and manner of speaking. Camilla, having noted these things, became more and more interested, and her impression was one of sympathy and admiration.

" All right. Get below, Guides," ordered Fred, and a few seconds after the deck was deserted, a light glowed dimly from the companion way, and sounds of tinkling cups and laughter came from within.

Camilla sat up in her loophole, leaning against the wall, and considered.

Her thoughts were an odd mixture of satisfaction at this influx of company and amazed contemplation of life's changes and developments! There was the castle —almost indestructible, its defences and its romance; and rocking on the moonlit water below, " Guides "— Sea Guides. The last word in modern progress, thought Camilla, looking down.

" In the days when this tower was whole the women were making tapestry in these rooms. And now the

women manage a little yacht like that and face, well, anything, I suppose."

She stared out over the sea into the shadowy distance and wondered how much the women helped in the old time sieges, and whether they threw down boiling water on the men who stormed the gate.

Then she drew herself close to the loophole again and gazed fascinated at the deck of the little yacht with the cosy gleam in the cabin. She waited, eagerly patient, because the sails still lay where they had sunk, for the most part, as the girls would come up again presently to finish the job of stowing. That was what kept Camilla watching, listening, thrilled by the advent of these interesting girls, for three years at a good school, where one meets all kinds of girls of one's own age and older, naturally gives any girl a sort of hankering for their company when she finds herself back at home with sisters as young as thirteen and fourteen. She may love them, and be keen to help them forward, but they do not quite fill in the need that is always there. Therefore, as Camilla heard the voices and chink of china it awoke needs that she was always trying to stifle by plans of helping her mother. There was a fine " boost " in hearing these new girls talk and laugh; she felt it was the last touch, making perfection of the glorious situation—if they meant to stop, and if they would be friends!

So absorbed was she that an alien sound escaped her for some seconds. Then suddenly she became aware of a gruff voice trying to speak in a whisper,

the result being a jerky growl mixed with hissing. Someone was coming along the tunnel in the wall that ran through the sea-front defences. that someone was rough and a native, by the accent that came to Camilla's ears.

It will be realized that Cam did not know what Marcus and the younger girls had seen already. Therefore it was as great a shock to her as it had been to them, to realize people acting strangely by invading the castle after a fashion that was not polite, to say the least of it.

"Cheek!" muttered Camilla, between her teeth, "boundless *cheek!*" After all, she thought, it was their castle—the Carmichael's castle at the present time, however much it belonged to the de Ruvignys. She wondered how many of the villagers wandered through the tunnel within the walls, and why? Quite a lot of thought passes quickly through an active mind; all the same the husky whispering voice was coming nearer and Camilla decided to be neither heard nor seen by these invaders, yet it was touch and go!

She jumped from the loophole, hid her torch carefully, and fled into the entrance of the tunnel she had come from. There was absolutely no other place to hide, because the winding stone steps to the upper part of the tower were obliterated by the fallen masonry and the story above was open to the sky in places. She could not go up or down, only back the way she had come, while she was keen to find out what was afoot.

Crouching in the dark of the broken passage she waited, and the first thing she saw was the light of an old ship's lantern on the rubbish-strewn floor. It advanced slowly towards the door of the room in the tower, and by the light of it Camilla saw boots, the tall weather-proof boots worn by fishermen; above the boots a worn guernsey; above that, shadow covered by a pulled-down knitted cap.

Plainly, here was a fisherman from the bay, and Camilla was amazed, because she had no idea how he got up to the battlements, as she had not seen the little door and the veiled stairway down the cliff face. Naturally she supposed he had come into the place by the gate and drawbridge, and she decided at once to tell her mother and arrange for a padlock—and security.

"What the population did in the time of the de Ruvigny occupation was their affair," thought Camilla, "but *we* don't intend to have the country folk ambling about the castle all night; it will not do!"

The man in boots disappeared with weighty steps into the tower room, and before she had recovered from that surprise she met with another one sufficiently staggering to upset all calculations!

Immediately behind the fisherman, Michelle Lemoyne, the cook, came stepping along with a sort of bouncing energy that went well with her short wide figure and much pleated full skirt. Camilla did not distinguish her face, as the lantern threw its ray on the ground, but there was much in her movements

and voice that suggested irritation, even bad temper! It appeared as though she were scolding the man and exclaiming in tragic tones about annoying things he had done. Yet, in spite of her anger, she did not fail to drop her voice every now and then as though afraid of being heard.

" Name of a little pig!" growled the man, " and what is it I have done to offend. It was not possible to arrive by day with this strange sailing-yacht actually at the walls. Very well then, my wife, is it that you wish to see me betrayed, and a great loss—indeed a loss of the most important—to Mademoiselle?"

" I ask is it likely that I desire loss to Mademoiselle? Oh, the foolishness of men—but they are children truly. It is days that you have not arrived, and the little one came only this afternoon to ask. Can Madame live upon air? That is what you expect, eh? Do you suppose she can obtain the medicine, the sugar, the stockings, with no money? Very well then, it is reasonable that you give it. Monsieur Picard he is of a hardness! Yes, indeed, that one is grasping; but if he obtains these medicines for Mademoiselle he is not content to make a present. Ah, no, the little one must pay, and how is that possible if nothing is done."

Camilla strained her wits as well as her ears to make out what all this contention was about, but who on earth this " little one ", or " poor little one ", might be she could not make out. These people talked so fast, interrupted one another so hotly, and used so many words she did not understand, or perhaps rather

an accent that school had not taught her. She found herself dazed as to why they were in this place at such an hour. It was confusing!

Concealing herself carefully still she waited to see the end of the business, or to get as near the end as she could anyway. Truth to tell, she was almost as angry with the cook as Marcus had been, but being older she made excuses and realized that you don't get cooks every day in the week, while this particular one was good, and a faithful servant of the castle folk. It was obvious that the stout fisherman was her husband—she had been spoken of as Madame Lemoyne. This again was an excuse, though Cam decided that Michelle was taking advantage of her position in a way that would shock Bethia if she knew, and as for Bethia's mother—words could not be found to express what *she* would say about it!

Just then the fisherman emerged from the dimly lighted tower chamber laden with the parcels already described; he carried as many as he could and Michelle followed—still talking busily—with several more. They went off down the passage they had come from and the moment Camilla lost sight of the swinging light rays of the ship's lantern she ran from her hiding-place and peeped into the ruined chamber. *All* the parcels had gone except one, a neatly done up package with waterproof covering and tightly lashed with string. Camilla picked it up, finding it lighter than she expected, though solid, for it was not a box.

Weighing it in her hands she hesitated, and then,

by some sudden impulse, she fled back to her refuge behind the broken masonry at the passage entrance and paused, breathing a little fast and listening.

The noise of altercation rumbled along the tunnel of the south wall, above the sea, and she presently heard the man coming back—knew it must be he, because of the tread and the lantern.

He passed across her field of vision, grumbling rather excitedly, but plainly too much under the thumb of his very dominant wife to resist. He tramped into the lower room, seemed to look around in each possible place by the light flickers that came through the doorway. Perhaps two minutes passed and then Monsieur Lemoyne came out again, still growling, but on a triumphant note this time; it appeared he was *right*. Madame, his wife, had declared there was another parcel left behind by his carelessness. There certainly was no other parcel, had he not examined the heaps of tumbled masonry and rubbish? Very well then, Madame was foolish, it was a pity women should be obstinate; he would tell her so.

Apparently he did tell her so, for along the tunnel came, as it were, jerks of conversation. Suppressed squeaks of temper from Michelle, moans from Joseph, and then a door shut with rather too loud a bang for the queer circumstances. Camilla heard the voice of their singularly active cook talking to herself probably, by the sound, and concluded that she had shut out her offending husband, and would now most likely go back to her bed near the kitchen.

Minutes passed and silence closed down on the dark tunnels and the ruined tower. Undoubtedly Michelle had gone off—but what had become of this fisherman Joseph Lemoyne if that was his name and position.

It will be remembered that so far Camilla did not know about the little door and steps down to the shore. But she realized that there must be some way of getting outside or into the other south tower—something different in fact—because of the man's arrival and the slam she had heard. Plucking up courage, and using her torch with greatest caution, she decided to pursue this surprising adventure; perhaps the reason she felt strongest urging her on was the idea for a story! Nobody could have such an adventure to write about, thought Camilla, or at least very rarely. Here was she diving into strange tunnels in the strangest ruins—eleven o'clock at night, or later, and—what about those parcels? Besides, it was her duty to find out what Michelle, the cook, was up to in league with her husband, and who was this " Mademoiselle " apparently in partnership.

" One simply can't leave it like this," thought the girl, as she paused to listen, " it would not be fair to Mummy. I've *got* to clear it up."

CHAPTER VI

The Crew of the "Blue Bird"

At the end of the passage in the wall was that deep little doorway that had been opened only that afternoon by the younger girls. There was the same big key in the ancient lock, and turning her torch on to it Camilla saw that the bolt was not slipped. Michelle had probably forgotten to turn the key in her hurry —or agitation.

She was just going to open the door softly when she heard—from without—the cry of a *cat*. It was the complaining wail of a cat used to being waited on. Obviously Mrs. MacStinger—having followed along the passage, probably drawn by whiffs of rats or mice—had passed outside when the door was open for the exit of Joseph Lemoyne, and was now shut out in loneliness.

Camilla lifted the heavy latch, drew the massive little door inwards, and threw her light on the ground outside. She saw the barrier—like a balustrade—of built rocks that shielded these rock steps and realized at once how the shore was reached, and that here was, as it were, a short cut to the beach and rocks below,

safe enough probably owing to the protection of that stone guard.

Mrs. MacStinger sat on the balustrade, perhaps three or four steps distant; she winked at the torch-light, opened her mouth very wide, and made the smallest possible sound in the back of her throat. It was a case of self-pity with the MacStinger, she considered herself an ill-used but very virtuous cat, and she had no intention of making matters too easy for cruel human beings.

Under her breath Camilla called:

" Puss, puss—kitty—come along—pussy, puss."

Mrs. MacStinger turned herself into a witch cat in a negligent manner. She arched up her back higher and higher till she was wonderfully thin and narrow—the shape of the latest possible croquet hoop, with the tail an upright stick crooked at the top. Then she sank—very deliberately—into a normal cat figure and stared at the view.

" Idiot!" said Camilla, and went down two steps.

Mrs. Mac walked the other way and sat down again.

At that inauspicious moment the key turned inside the door. Camilla heard it with a horrid shock. Michelle had remembered her oversight, rushed back and simply locked the door. No sound of her coming had warned the girl owing to the thickness of the walls and the thousand and one night noises outside, for though any person would have called it a quiet night, all the world was full of the mutter and ripple of creeping water,

and the shifting creak of ropes, chains, and wooden hulls.

What to do now? Here was indeed a most disastrous fix!

Camilla had a momentary impulse to cry out on the chance that Michelle would hear, but checked it in time. The cook would certainly not have heard, though the boats moored below would have been awakened to great excitement. Camilla realized just in time to close her lips, after which she told Mrs. MacStinger in a whisper exactly what was her conduct and character; because, the door being irrevocably locked, that cat ran up the steps with agile bounds, sat down close to it, and mewed miserably.

" It would serve you right to throw you over into the sea," said Cam bitterly.

Two or three minutes of anxious consideration brought but one idea.

To go down to the bottom and see if the tide was still low enough to allow of a person getting round La Tasse bay to the steep climb beyond. A path, or steps, the girl knew of, or rather had heard mentioned. She could climb to the top, come round cautiously to the main entrance, over the drawbridge, and hope that the little wicket gate within the big one was not locked. Anyway that would be a chance, like the door into the dwelling part. Both simply " chances ", but no more! Camilla was not one to cross bridges before she came to them; time enough to despair when she knew for certain she was locked out.

She realized that she must take the cat as well as the parcel. Really it was a most amazing adventure, well worth turning into a story, thought Camilla, as she picked up Mrs. MacStinger, tucked the parcel firmly under the other arm, and prepared to attempt these amazing steps.

Fortunately she was very sure-footed and possessed a level head, for what with one thing and the other, it would have been the simplest matter to slip, indeed, difficult to stop on her feet with the cat clinging to her shoulder, and driving claws like pin points through the thin cloth of her coat.

" All your fault, you blithering cat," cried Cam, as Mrs. Mac scraped her own face against the girl's, " now, let me alone or I can't see." Mrs. Mac purred loudly, *she* didn't take the situation to heart in the least.

One of Camilla's chief anxieties at the moment was the whereabouts of Michelle's husband. She felt uneasy lest he should come back up the steps, for she realized now that he must be one of the fishermen whose craft were moored somewhere between La Tasse and the river creek. Where, it was not possible to know till one had further experience. This, of course, would make a great difference, because she might walk into him when she arrived at the bottom.

" But," whispered Camilla to the cat, " if I do, what is there to be afraid of? It's *my* castle, he is nothing but a trespasser; with a guilty conscience too, considering his behaviour."

Mrs. Mac flattened her ears in a tigerish way and drove her claws into the coat. She had no conscience at any rate, and trespassing was one of her amusements. At this moment Camilla remembered that she was wearing stockings only, and sighed because they would be ruined surely; however, it was too late to worry, though she could not forget it, because the stones hurt her. There were drawbacks to this night adventure, however useful in literature.

Down she went, and down, finding some of the steps wide but shallow, while some were short and so steep that she had to hold on to the balustrade of stone on the outside while reaching for the next. Also, she thought she heard the soft rattle of an oar in the rowlock not very far off, which brought the uneasy suspicion that Monsieur Lemoyne might be waiting hard by the foot of the steps.

" One can always bluff it out," said Cam to the cat, " he really can't *do* anything," and she went on down, with increased care.

Then a queer instinct of the nearness of a human being made her stop to listen, and from below she heard a soft cautious *whistle*, a gentle inquiring kind of whistle.

The idea woke in her mind that the fisherman had seen her coming down, supposed her to be Michelle following him with the lost parcel, and was now trying to draw her attention. She could not decide whether to reply or not. It was an awkward dilemma—so she did nothing, but went on very slowly, pausing and

listening, for the curve of this strange stair around the uneven face of the cliff concealed the end from her; even in the day you could not see the foot from the door at the top, and at the present, with that young moon hid by a cloud, there was only uncertain possibility of light confused by shadow.

" I sa-a-y," hissed a soft voice, then after a short pause, " it's all right."

Distinctly a girl's voice, and Camilla felt her own heart give a little jump of excitement.

Without hesitation she answered by the softest possible whisper.

Surely, surely, here could be nobody but one of those interesting sailor girls, yet she hardly dared hope for such luck.

Two steps more and she realized a dark shape close against the cliff, a round pale patch indicating a face gazing up.

" I say," came a whisper, " anything up?"

" Rather, I'm locked out," murmured Camilla, " I'll explain in a moment."

" Don't worry. Guess we can help you through," answered the girl, and they met. " Do you belong to that heavenly castle?"

" Yes, we've taken it, only came to-day. There is something funny going on though, and I got fixed following it up."

" The man, you mean?" asked the girl.

" Did you see him then?"

" We did. Keeping an eye open is our job. I'll explain presently. Here, can't I carry something?"

" It's our cat," said Camilla, still speaking under her breath, " the silly thing got shut out and shrieked, of course. I went after her, and the cook came back and locked *me* out. Then I was done."

" The cook?"

" Yes, ours. You see we took the cook with the castle. I'm afraid she's up to some game."

" Ah, likely enough. Look here, if you go a step or two down you'll find our dinghy, my sister is holding on. Will you come aboard our yawl? Perhaps we can think of a plan."

" Oh, *thanks*," murmured Camilla fervently, " my plan was to go round to the path up, by the sands. We are told there *is* a path up beyond this bit of cliff."

" There is no sand now," said the girl, " tide's just covered it, shallow, but you'd have to wade, you see."

" Oh, crikey," gasped Camilla, " how deadly!"

" Never mind, we'll see you through, my dear girl, we've been watching all this job and saw you outside the postern gate at the top when the door slammed. We couldn't think what you were up to, unless you waited for a boat, and we'd seen the man go—it's like this too—we are Sea Guides afloat, and we have to be jolly careful not to make trouble or barge into other people's affairs and all that. We may *help* all we can, but—well—you know, we are not in the world to run folk's jobs for them unless they ask us."

" I *say*," murmured Camilla, " how awfully exciting!

I didn't know there were Sea Guides, I mean—very vaguely anyway."

Any further conversation about Guides or any other subject was cut off at this moment by the softest whistle from hard by, and Camilla became aware of a black shape at the foot of the rocks, a small boat that would probably have been scraping and knocking, as the ripples shifted it against the lowest steps, but for the capable management of another girl, dressed also in dark skirt and jumper and looking up at them from eyes that showed large and dark in a pale patch of face.

" This is my sister," introduced the first girl, " and she's all right as far as she goes, but not considered old enough to be a full-blown Sea Guide—so please think of her as a Powder Monkey, a Sea Urchin, a Tadpole or a Sprat—*or* all four at once. She's a *Guide* all right, no fraud. We'll explain later, when you and the cat come on board."

" *Cat!*" exclaimed the younger sister, " I say, how jolly!"

" Not at all jolly *really*," said Cam, " for she's fixed every one of her claws into some part of my person and is holding on like a drowning man—really, it's agony. If you pull her off "—this to the elder sister—" you'll bring off pieces of me, in her hands."

" I'm awfully tactful," was the answer, then as she threw the parcel to her sister, " here, Pat, stow under the stern seat, and stand by to catch cats."

" Oh, you are Pat," said Camilla, checking at the word.

"That's so—but why? Here, put a hand on my shoulder, I'll steady the dinghy."

Camilla stepped down and took the bows seat in a capable manner, then she made reply.

"Well, I was watching you and your yacht with eyes absolutely starting from my head, up in that loophole, in the tower at this end of the wall."

"*There*, Fred was right," broke in Pat, taking her place on the middle seat, "the Skipper really is great! She vowed there was a shape up at that loophole and that she saw glims of a torch. Nell wouldn't believe her. Now we can prove the rightness of the statement. You see, fully believing these two sea towers were simply ruins, we naturally considered her assertion unreliable."

"Sprat, you're using awfully long words," remarked her sister jumping down lightly into the stern and taking charge of the steering job.

The younger sister, thus snubbed, made no answer, but sculled with light strokes till they slipped alongside the quiet hull of the lovely yawl. Camilla noticed a name painted just beneath the counter stern but could not see what it was.

The younger girl shipped her sculls with a smart movement and in perfect silence. Then she stood up, caught hold of the counter with her left hand, and saluted with her right. Another girl was standing on board, but within a sort of steering-well from which entrance was reached to the little saloon. Camilla could catch glimpses of the comfort inside, and the

fourth girl looking out from the door of the companion.

" Good evening," greeted the contralto voice that Cam had heard from the loophole, " I hope we've done you a good turn. We set out for that purpose."

" Sure," answered Camilla warmly, " I should have had to wade round from the rock stair to the path along there—if there is a path, that's to say. I only know of it by report. With a cat and a parcel and too much water for a comfortable passage it would have been no easy job. I'm simply blessing you—Skipper. That's your title, isn't it? You are a wonderful surprise; we only expected fishing-boats."

" For the matter of that, we only expected the natives and a gorgeous ruin. It's the grandest thing I've seen."

" Yes, so we think," agreed Camilla, who was trying to see the face of the speaker; " it is chock full of mysteries, by the way."

" So it ought to be," said the Skipper; " come aboard, won't you—hand me the cat. All right, I like cats. We'll have some cocoa and a few words of explanation, and then we'll put you ashore. Oh, yes, a steep irregular path comes down from the top farther along. Someone will go with you; we won't leave you to seek your fortune alone."

Within ten minutes Camilla found herself sitting on a cushioned seat that was long and narrow. Along each side of the comfortable low saloon they filled in a space below bunks in the bulwarks and were lockers

for keeping clothes in. A swinging lamp hung from the ceiling and a fixed table in the middle offered the usual convenient rests for bad weather. A low door at the end opened into a place from whence came warmth and sounds of boiling water, obviously a little galley—which is to say kitchen.

Camilla had no experience of sailing, and the very completeness of it, the simplicity and clever arrangement of space gave her positive pleasure.

Once all together in the light, the girls looked at her, and she at them, with immense interest.

The Skipper was of middle height and average build. She explained herself as aged twenty-two, daughter and granddaughter of sailors, and her name was Frederica Jervis; the other girl who had remained on board and been alluded to as " Nell " was her first cousin Elinor Blake, and nearly twenty. The two who managed the dinghy were Lesley and Patricia Anson, from the school in which Nell had been " finished ", ages eighteen and just seventeen. It appeared that they had all been Guides and Frederica a Ranger of notable qualities. Now they were all attached to their company as Sea Guides, and practical sailing was at present their job, on Fred's own yawl, the *Blue Bird*. She had been trained in boatcraft, and an indulgent grandfather, proud of her skill, had given her this yawl for her own when she grew up and developed the necessary powers.

As Cam listened she watched the Skipper with great interest, and realized that she possessed the seaman's

eyes—grey, deep-set, with the rare steady far-seeing look common only among sailors. For the rest, she was not exactly pretty, but to Camilla anyway very attractive, because of a certain hawk-like look of energy in her clear brown face with the aquiline features and straight but humorous mouth. Fred was by no means a beauty, as beauties are supposed to be, but she was far more attractive than ninety-nine beauties out of a hundred: there was strong character of a high standard expressed in her face.

Nor were the Ansons exactly pretty. Very much alike, Patricia was, so to speak, more so. Her hair a more vivid red, her eyes a more sparkling green, and her features, if anything, more sharply cut in their retroussé outline. Their fair skins were freckled and they had rather wide mouths and fine teeth. They gave the impression of being very much alive and ready for anything, which was the truth. They were strong, active, and capable, in fact first-rate Guides—land or sea—but with the sea life in their blood.

Elinor Blake, Fred's cousin betwixt and between, as people say, was the most strikingly pretty of the four. She had blue eyes and fair hair, a good complexion, and straight features. She was very good-looking and knew it! Nor did Camilla fail to notice how she glanced at her own image several times in the square looking-glass on the wall at the division end of the cosy saloon.

However, Cam was not the least narrow or ill-natured. She knew dozens of girls who looked in the glass pretty often, and was not prejudiced by seeing

the habit, but she liked the other girls best, being drawn to their earnest concentration on the job in hand and their gay sense of fun.

Having been introduced all round, Camilla explained herself and her belongings.

"You see," she concluded, "after a fashion I am responsible, because mother put the advertisement in to please me in the first place, and then I persuaded her to take the castle for the summer. You see it appears to be gorgeously extravagant, but it really is a ruin. Only the one tower is habitable, and we brought only our one servant Bethia. Mrs. Lemoyne belongs to the place; Mother wanted her to stop on because she knows the ropes, and the village, and can get things in the food line. Our house is just that one sound tower, all the rest is sheer glory and romance——"

"And mysterious possibilities, eh?" suggested Lesley Anson, narrowing her green eyes; "here, my dear girl, have some cocoa, I assure you it's top-hole, and, look here, d'you mind if the Skipper takes a peep into your parcel? Far away in the tail of my brain I've got a small but lively idea."

CHAPTER VII

The Adventure of the Rock Passage

" I say," suggested Pat, in a hasty aside, " can't I lend you some shoes, and you'd better chuck the stockings, they're soaked. Here, pull them off and I'll dry them in the galley."

" What's a galley? Is it your oven?" inquired Camilla, as she acted on the advice. " They *are* sopped, horrible. Oh, *thanks!*" as the other girl handed over a pair of woollen stockings that she produced from a locker.

" Our galley," Pat informed her, " is the kitchen, store cupboards are hard by—all that is amidships; and in the forecastle, where a crew is supposed to sleep, we keep spare sails, also two spare bunks for all our guests, you see, when they crowd," she laughed, and was proceeding to further information when an exclamation from her sister caused her to look across at the Skipper and the two girls leaning forwards on the opposite seat.

" Snakes!" said Lesley.

" Oh, Fred, what beauties!" cried Nell.

Fred laid the parcel on the swing table, holding down the wrappings with her long brown fingers that looked so capable.

"Hum," grunted the Skipper, "looks like——" she checked, gazing at the tightly strapped contents of the parcel. Between strips of white cardboard lay many pairs of fine silk stockings in delicate pale shades.

"Oh, Miss Carmichael, do let me buy them from you," urged Nell.

Camilla grew rather pink under the light of the little shaded lamp that trembled with the movement of the tide.

"Oh," she hesitated uneasily, "I'm awfully sorry, but you see they're not mine—I mean——"

"You can consider them yours surely, why——"

"My dear Nell, dry up for any sake," the Skipper snubbed her in a vexed voice. "Of course she can't. The parcel is not hers."

"Well, who does it belong to then?" asked Nell as she sipped cocoa, her eyebrows raised in a deprecating manner.

"That is what we may know later," said Lesley, "but for the present I vote the Skipper hangs on to them."

"Oh no," answered Fred briskly, "I don't think I'll do that. It might be awkward."

"My dear girl, do be sensible," urged Nell, "now *how* awkward?"

"When we go back, and we might make the run

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SILK STOCKINGS

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any time of course, I couldn't explain the things. One would have to take them on shore and " declare " them and pay damages, or whatever it is; they levy huge fines anyway, as no one is allowed to bring them in now."

" If you make the run right away *home*," suggested Nell, " you could take them up in your baggage easily, as we have no Customs at Bagendon S. Giles, besides they wouldn't bother you, if they had. I must say it seems senseless, considering no one knows who they belong to. If Miss Carmichael doesn't want them, I do. Why not make a deal? I'll take the responsibility."

" Not on my boat," retorted Fred drily, " if you choose to go back home by the steamer route, and play tricks of that kind, well—do it. But you don't catch us mixing ourselves in rotten smuggling games. It's impossible. I'm a Ranger, Les and Pat are Sea Guides—our job is to uphold the law and traditions of the Navy. Wherever we find things going wrong we have promised to keep the right end up. Sorry, old girl, but there it is."

" Nobody takes smuggling *seriously*," protested Nell, " men on the coast have been doing it for years and years, they *always* do it. It's an adventure, a lark."

" Oh, is it? Well, as I said, sorry, but that can't be our point of view. We can no more do it than Naval Officers can, it's outside the pale, so let's drop the subject. If Miss Carmichael likes, they can be left

here—at present. She can't carry armfuls of things with that climb in view."

Fred glanced across at Camilla and smiled. Cam felt that she quite loved her, she had such a nice face—it was so keen and sincere—just the face you would want to be real friends with.

Before the owner of the fascinating stockings could make a decision though, Pat broke into the discussion.

"Look here, Skipper, why not row this poor thing round to the river and walk up where the path is easy, laden with cats and stockings? Les and I would just as soon take the *Dickie Bird* round there, as the other way, wouldn't you, Les?"

Lesley nodded, her chin on her hand, elbows on knees.

"Pity you can't stop here to-night," she suggested.

"I couldn't. You see the girls might go to my room. If Mummy found I was missing she'd worry —*much*."

"How will you get in when you are there?" asked Pat with interest.

Camilla explained the build of the gate in the portcullis archway. A big gate usually locked, but a small wicket gate also, within the big one—only latching as far as one could see, and not locked, at least, Camilla declared she had not seen it locked.

"If I can't get through the wicket," she told them, "I shall give three long owl hoots pretty loud, my sisters in the top room of the tower will hear, and come

down; you see, it's our family distress call. We always send it out—if possible—when we are cornered in anyway. Their loophole looks out that way and they both wake easily. I think I ought to go now, truly I do. I am so afraid mother will get uneasy, one never knows. My stockings will be dry enough, sure."

"And what about these?" questioned Fred, glancing up from the neat and substantial package.

"Oh, I think I'd better take them," answered Cam. "I believe—at least I mean it's quite on the cards that I might find out who—you see, we are *in* the castle after all."

"Just so," agreed Fred, "less said the better at present, but remember we shall be about here for some time, and if there is anything we can do—at any time send out the S.O.S. No thanks, it's our job."

Camilla, the cat and the parcel took possession of the stern-sheets. The Anson sisters rowed, Lesley in the bows steering by clever management of her scull. Camilla noticed as she settled herself that they had a strip of felt packed round the oar within the rowlocks, thus ensuring silence in all movement.

"See you again," whispered the Skipper, as she leaned down and pushed off the small boat that was scraping lazily against the neat fenders hanging downward to protect the shining paint of the *Blue Bird's* graceful hull, "Look out, you Guides," said she, "keep your eyes and ears open; any news may be grist to the mill; remember we ought to know what is going on. And take care of the passenger."

" *Passengers*," suggested Pat in a low voice, " please don't insult the cat!"

" Give way," ordered Lesley, and the sculls dipped evenly but without sound. Camilla was deeply impressed by that, because she had never been present at rowing that was not accompanied by a fair amount of noise, what with splashes and the rattle of rowlocks.

She said nothing at all, wisely realizing that the Ansons wanted perfect silence. She just looked about, tried to see, and wondered at the clever way in which they steered themselves through shadow that was very dark indeed.

Camilla felt rather awed as she gazed at the tall frontage of the cliff topped by the battlements and broken outline of the old towers. It was not distinct, which made a mysterious attraction of course; she thought of one of Gustave Doré's pictures with flying clouds and misty castles against the sky. " And to think that one *lives* in it," thought Camilla, " lives in it and already——"

That was just it! The mystery of what was happening, what people were doing in Le Camp Geffroy! Undoubtedly something they wanted to hide, but why and what? Camilla was not learned in things she had no experience of, she was puzzling and reviewing eagerly, when the dinghy checked, and Lesley whispered an order to Pat, who was looking over her shoulder at her sister in the bows.

" Back, Pat—quiet as you like—get her into the rocks, we'll watch this."

" Right you are," came the low answer, and Camilla found the stern, in which was her seat, sliding back and back within a narrow opening among the weed-covered rocks that formed a foreshore at low tide, but were covered by water when the sea was in. You couldn't call it a creek, it was not important enough for that. It was merely a gully, with causeways of rock on either side, and wave-washed brown seaweed swaying lazily in and out of the rising ripple, for every ten minutes the sea rose a little higher, till at high tide the narrow strip of channel would spread over the rocks and make all that foreshore appear to be just harmless sea over sand!

All this, of course, the Ansons understood, but, of course, Camilla did not; to her the long ranks of slippery rock were fascinating, and the dangers all around were quite hidden from her. It was not for a minute or two that she realized why the two girls were backing along this narrow channel and why they preserved such a strenuous air of caution. When she asked a question Pat " hushed " her firmly. So she waited, soothing Mrs. MacStinger's alert uneasiness, till Lesley and Pat exchanged a low word or two, shipped their sculls with deft silent movements, and waited. There was no sound but the soft brush of the dinghy against the heavy brown weed, and no movement but the little lift and fall of the boat and the fringes.

" *Now* do you see why?" said Pat, and she touched Camilla's chin with cold wet finger-tips. " Here, my

dear, just pop on this, tie it across your face, you can see through it all right and it prevents one from looking like a white patch. They *might* notice, of course."

"*This*" was a gauze veil, black or dark blue. Camilla noticed that when Lesley had enveloped her head her face became almost invisible; she did as she was told, feeling thrilled, but wondering why all the more!

Lesley was sitting motionless, staring at the sea beyond the rocks, and Pat, leaning her veiled head close to Camilla's, proceeded to try and "put her wise", as the folk say out West.

'Can't you see the ketch out there in the open? I mean that big fishing-boat with the main-sail going up; hark to the faint squeaking as it rises. Her bowsprit points out to sea because the tide is pushing her, so you can't see the lights on the stays—green on this side, nearest to the rocks, that is starboard you know. Port is a red light on the other side. When they are at anchor they carry a white light high up on the forestay, it prevents collisions and all that sort of thing," added Pat, rather largely. Camilla nodded, keenly interested.

"But what about the fishing-boat," she whispered, "you don't mean——"

"*Rather*, you bet it's your man who took all the parcels and went back for the stockings. The Skipper twigged the game in a moment; they are going now with a cargo of smuggled things. That's to say, they *will* be smuggled when they get to England. I don't

suppose these men actually land them, probably they'd get caught easily if they tried. They'll meet up with someone behind the scenes off our coasts and sell the whole lot, then those men will know where to place them. Why, we heard there is a regular traffic in goods from this side, now the Government has put a heavy duty on silk. They shirk the Droit de Douane, Customs Duty, that way, you see, and I expect they make a good thing out of it."

" I don't think it's at all *nice*," declared Camilla, with decision.

Patricia giggled and Lesley ordered silence. Then she leaned over and touched her sister's arm, whispering and pointing. Pat froze into breathless attention, and Cam, following their gaze as well as her inexperience allowed, looked ahead into the night, and saw—rather confused, but still distinguishable—figures on the deck of that fishing-boat. A man was moving in the fore part and the faint sound of shifting canvas suggested that he was setting the jib, while a black shadow enlarging itself along the spar of the bowsprit proved this was so. Another shape seemed to be busy near the mast, and in the stern were two more, one square and heavy of build, one very slim, with, as far as was possible to see, a feminine shape. As Camilla noted that slim figure a startling thought flashed through her mind—instantly she rejected it.

These two talked together, yet no voices could be heard. There was, you see, a fair stretch of rocks between the fisher ketch and the sheltering place where

the dinghy rubbed softly against the hanging weed, voices would have to be raised if they were to carry with the wind off shore against the incoming force of the great volume of water on the rising tide. Therefore no words came to the ears of the listening trio, but their eyes told them that the fisherman and the girl were talking earnestly. As the folds of the jib began to loosen and flap with little sharp reports, the man went down on his face, pulling in a boat that was alongside, hidden in the deep shade of the hull. Then the girl—if the other person was a girl—jumped down, and Camilla thought she heard the little rattle as her feet came on the floor-boards. *Was* it a girl? The thought returned.

A minute after that brisk but silent movement attacked the waiting dinghy.

"Gemini!" whispered Pat, with an excited giggle, "Les says she's coming through this channel. Last thing we wanted. We must get ahead slick as we can; bad luck, as we are stern foremost. However, we will shove, and, I say, do you mind just pulling along by the weed? I guess there's a way out at the other end. You bet it's a cross cut to the river channel; Les says it must be."

"Right you are," whispered Camilla, and seizing the wet strands of weed with a firm grasp, she pulled the boat on. As she pulled, mechanically obeying the other girls' request, she dwelt on those words, "Les says *she* is coming through this channel." Who was "she" then? Certainly not Michelle.

Directly after that the Anson girls shoved against the rocks with their sculls, and the combined forces drove the little light craft with surprising swiftness between the rock barriers of the channel.

"She can't row either—not room," said Pat; "if she sees us, won't she be sick!"

"Sh-ssh," came Lesley's warning, and without sound they sped along in this odd fashion to an unknown destination, a waste of brown rocks on the side bordering the channel, and on the land side rugged steeps of cliff only less precipitous than the castle frontage.

This rock channel twisted, but was always narrow, and for minutes they flew along at an even pace, Pat suppressing giggles and murmuring ejaculations to Camilla. They seemed to be rounding a faintly marked point and coming into the gorge of the channel leading inward to the village of Petit Colin, but it was not possible to know anything for certain with only the sky and cliffs to guide them, and a mass of blackness making uncertainty below.

Then suddenly they emerged into a space of open water; scattered rocks showed black here and there, and a rim of blackness made a frame, so that eyes now used to the night could see a patch of rippled sea rising steadily to cover more and more of its rock borders.

Lesley lost no time staring at the situation. She and Pat swung the boat round, and keeping as near as they safely could to the bordering rocks, they pulled shoreward with the same silent but strong strokes. Lesley,

in the bows, prevented a noise of grounding, and with great care pushed the sharp nose of the dinghy between rocks in the shadow of the steep, and a minute after they were all three on their feet, feeling soft sand and stones, and aware of a steep rise close at hand up the rugged surface of the cliff, hardly a path, yet a track that was usable, and which came down to the shore in this little rock-circled pond.

Camilla stood aside, clasping the cat and the parcel, while the Anson girls went into action, as it were, with the most capable disposition of their boat. They picked it up, over the rocks and along some yards towards the castle foreshore, planted it there above high-water mark among the scrubby furze and thick-growing coarse grass, and wedged the little anchor between great stones.

Camilla waited, listening rather breathlessly as she heard the following boat coming. She realized that here was the better way up to the castle from the long creek, and looking up she could see the black blot of the habitable tower printed on the dim sky, windy clouds driving past it.

The girl who was confederate of smuggling fishermen was going to land here, and Cam was keenly anxious to see her if she could manage it without being seen herself. Who could the girl be but Etoile de Ruvigny, child of romance and hard fate? It was all very queer, but rather enthralling if you are keen on exciting stories to the extent of writing them. Here was an amazing situation.

Then Pat pounced on her and pulled her aside.

"She's coming up in two jiffs, there's her boat," whispered Pat, suddenly close at hand, "won't you lie low? *I* don't want to be introduced this time of night."

Camilla yielded to the pull on her arm and in a moment was crouching close to the bushes in Pat's company, yet with a curiously uncertain mind about the whole affair. She hated hiding, and fleeing before this girl, yet did not know exactly how to meet her. So she let Pat do the guiding and just waited.

They saw the shadow of a boat run alongside the rock at the bottom. They heard the faint rattle of an anchor and the bumping of oars being shifted, and then the girl was coming up the steep track.

Camilla stared with anxious intensity, but could not distinguish features as the figure came level with the bushes and went on, bending forward, breathing a little fast.

Of course the veil made seeing more difficult, and the face was not turned towards them, though more than once the climbing girl checked, listened, and stood gazing back at the pale shimmer of the shifting sea and the long ridges of the rocks.

What Patricia thought was not possible to tell, and Lesley was quiet as the dinghy; they were both immovable as they watched, but one member of the party—after the manner of her kind—took that opportunity to act in a perverse and objectionable manner.

Camilla said afterwards that being absorbed in the

progress of this strange girl she might have squeezed the cat, or made her uncomfortable—the sort of thing no cat allows without protest. In any case at that critical moment Mrs. MacStinger leaped from Cam's embracing arm and ran up the path level with the girl, then with a little bound leaped ahead and walked slowly in front with a very stiff tail held like a mast, while she made conversational noises and queer little brittle mews that broke half-way.

CHAPTER VIII

The Little Man, and Etoile

Camilla's intention wavered. She heard Pat stifle a giggle with a faint whisper of " crikey!" She thought she heard Lesley move, uneasily, but neither of them did anything definite. Her own mind reasoned: " Why not? Cats are often about at night—she will think it's a stray cat." " She " of course standing for the strange boating girl who climbed the path slowly.

" M-r-r-r-r-r," said Mrs. MacStinger, skipping sideways with her tail hooked—then, no doubt remembering her family and responsibilities, she walked or trotted as the ground allowed.

" Oh dear," breathed Camilla, " what shall we do?"

" Wait and see," murmured Pat, giggling.

It appeared to them that the climbing figure checked and stooped; there was a pause as though that girl had her hands full—literally she had! Then she moved on slowly and the difficulty of seeing her at all increased, her shape was merged in the irregularities of the steep hill front.

Lesley crept forward and sat down by Camilla.

" She's picked up your cat," said Lesley.

" I know. I'll have to go after her," answered Cam in a troubled voice.

" Oh, I say—impossible," came from Pat.

"Why impossible?" demanded Camilla in a tone that seemed to impress her companions into silent amaze.

Camilla went on hurriedly, seeing her own point of view more strongly as she argued.

" Why on earth not? Here's a girl who is on the sea when we are. What she does is no business of mine, but——"

" But, Miss Carmichael, we don't want her to know that we have found out she smuggles or is in league with smugglers, do we? I mean, it wouldn't please *you* if *she* found out you were stealing, would it?" This from Lesley in a quiet reproving voice.

" But she is not stealing," answered Cam firmly, " the real smugglers are the people on our coast who cheat British Customs."

" She is aiding and abetting," said Pat, " and of *course* it's wrong. She is helping to supply goods that ought to pay duty in a way that shirks the duty, it's a jolly bad thing for poor old England. You know those long cylinders you saw that looked like rolls of paper pieces?"

" They *were* paper; I've often seen it in rolls to do rooms," answered Cam.

" Only on the outside, my dear girl. Inside they are full of saccharine tabloids to sell to chemists—worth hundreds and hundreds. Fred says the duty is huge.

The boxes have patent medicines in them, and as for stockings and silk scarves—that sort of thing—you know what is in your parcel."

" Oh yes," agreed Camilla with a tinge of impatience in her tone. She was the least bit restive at Pat's lecturing. After all, smuggling was, in her eyes—as in the eyes of many people, decidedly romantic and exciting. Hiding goods in your boxes and telling lies to Customs' men, was quite another matter—utterly mean and low down, according to Camilla's standard, and the standard of all the Carmichael family, but where this adventurous lonely girl came in she was inclined to see matters in a different light. It was not easy to understand the whole working of this business, but to Camilla it appeared that *poverty* was at the back of it—sheer need of money, with that glorious old castle as a severe handicap! Supposing this girl should be Etoile de Ruvigny, which seemed probable, because the cook was obviously an agent, and the cook's husband an actor—supposing then it *should* be Etoile, Camilla was conscious of distinct sympathy.

She liked these Sea Guides, they were very jolly and capable, exactly the kind of girls she wanted to meet, and her sisters to know, but in her heart she did not go entirely with their severe strictures about this queer private smuggling.

Now everybody knows how fast a person can think, how a rush of thoughts passes through the mind in two minutes. That which takes many minutes to write down flashes through the mind in an instant.

It was so in this case. Camilla was thinking, confused impressions following one another as the Anson girls whispered eagerly. She *heard* them, but nothing changed the sympathy already awake in her heart for this girl smuggler, and her eyes were fixed intently in the direction where the darkness had swallowed her climbing figure. Night wrapped the face of the steep, but Camilla continued to gaze anxiously till suddenly a slim black shape showed on the top, rose above the edge of the Down, and stood still, probably looking back.

With one of her sudden impulses Camilla acted.

" Sorry," she said, in rather a breathless voice, " but truly I can*not* let the cat go. I've got to fetch her back; I must. There are the kittens, and June. It will be a dreadful bother if she's lost; thanks *awfully*, but I can't wait. I'll get Mrs. Mac and then go to the castle."

" But look here," expostulated Lesley.

" But I say, you *can't!*" exclaimed Pat.

Their words followed Camilla but she ignored the sound. With a rush of energy she started up the track in just the same way that one goes upstairs three steps at a time! A big effort, a scramble, a run where possible, a pause for breath, then a rush again! In a funny way she was glad to be doing it. She had made a sudden decision, and she said aloud as she climbed:

" I believe I'm a blithering idiot, but I *felt* I wanted to."

That ascent must have been a record, the coarse

grass being slippery and stones loose, but she was in the mood to do desperate things, the strange night had put something into her nerves perhaps. She rather revelled in the difficulty of the climb and the queer excitement of this wild adventure.

Reaching the top without a pause she ran on, not knowing the way, but aware that the village must be ahead and reasoning that the girl with the cat could not be far away. Her pace had dropped to something half trot, half swift walk, all she could do over this treacherous ground with the cliff break on her right, and an edge ready to betray her at any moment. You see, once she left the cliff she would have no guide to follow, for everywhere else seemed to be just wild deserted heath, dotted with irregular humps, ditches, holes, and acres of wind-blown gorse.

That being so, Camilla hastened on, following the line of the cliff edge and looking out eagerly for this girl she was following—looking out, that is to say, as well as the darkness would let her.

She could discern the patched confusion of the heath. She could make out square blots of blackness behind her, against the sky, which must be the towers of Le Camp Geffroy. And she could see the silver thread of the channel far down in the blackness of Ste. Magloire creek, the gorge to her right.

It was all so extraordinary, and in a way unpleasant, that Camilla decided she could not possibly go on in this mad fashion. "There's no *sense* in it," she murmured with irritation, "and if darling Mum gets

frightened——" her feeling was that *if* such a thing happened she would wish she had never invented this castle idea and that it might have been better for them all to have remained at ugly little Hillside. " Why can't people behave reasonably—after all," the impatient thought passed through her mind, with the impulse close upon it to turn then, at once, and go as fast as possible back to where those black battlements seemed to be inked on the hurrying clouds. " It's perfectly awful!" decided Camilla in conclusion, stifling a yawn that felt like a sob.

At that despondent moment Camilla's attention was awakened to keen interest by a tall building, the outline of which was like a tower round on the top. On the side of the tower glowed one spot of red light like an eye, while it was obvious if you considered the odd erection reasonably that it must be standing on the edge of the cliff at a place where the ground was higher, otherwise it would not be such a landmark.

As she drew nearer the conviction swept over her mind that the tall, odd-shaped shadow ahead of her must be the windmill, the Moulin du Prince, to which the Comtesse and her daughter had retired when they let the castle. She had heard that the mill was between the castle and the village of Grand Colin, but owing to the shape of the moor one could not see it. " Just the mill house with the sails gone," thought Camilla, " rather a nice place to live in, so uncommon, the sort of dwelling you could make a story about." Camilla's

mind always switched off on to a story directly anything unusual appeared.

She checked herself and stood still to consider the whole situation in all its bearings, and to decide what was best to be done. In the first place it would not be possible to make a call on Etoile de Ruvigny in the middle of the night, cat or no cat! Mrs. MacStinger must bear the punishment of her casual conduct; Camilla felt that June would understand, as she was a very reasonable child.

If this was the windmill and the surprising girl had got away into it, there was no course left for herself but to turn round at once and make for the castle, whistle the owl's call on the drawbridge and trust to the keen ears of Pen and Pam for entrance. She knew her mother would understand—she was such a comfortable mother when you came to surprising events. She always saw possibilities and never took a stiff sort of view.

" Well," thought Camilla, viewing her surroundings with an eye as dispassionate as she could make it—in spite of qualms, " one isn't often drawn into such an insane adventure, but Mummy will see how it was, and after all——"

She was going to comfort herself with the feeling that an adventure of any kind was worth having after months of Hillside, especially if one gained friends like the Sea Guides, but her mind was checked in full flight by the sudden shock of seeing a shape materialize directly in front of her. Shorter than herself, in fact

quite short, square, stout—Camilla jumped back with a hasty repulsion.

But this weird person did not wait for her to speak. *He* burst out at once with a torrent of excited words in French. Questions and reproach apparently! Camilla was actually dazed, because the person wrung his hands with frenzied despair, or what looked like despair, the while he chattered so fast that she could not follow more than a word here and there.

As Camilla said afterwards, "You can*not* follow foreign languages when people simply gabble, it's not fair; after all, one ought to speak plain," and her sisters agreed with her warmly, for they felt how unfair it was not to give people a chance.

Well, Camilla certainly had little chance in this case! What with the amazing situation, the time, and the weariness, what with her distracted thoughts, eagerness to get home, and irritation, it was not possible to give intelligent attention to this excitable little stranger. She waited, trying to concentrate, found it was useless, and choosing her words carefully said that she wanted to go home, but was looking for her cat, and would he please say what he wanted?

Oddly enough she had a most unconquerable desire to laugh—to laugh heartily.

"It's like a French Exercise book," thought the girl. "I cannot find the cat, but my uncle's gardener is dancing on the moor," She began to giggle, and coughed to hide it.

"Le chat! Quel chat?" squeaked the little man

despairingly, as his voice rose higher. He had been wearing a soft hat, this he wrenched from his head and beat wildly on a gorse clump with it. Camilla saw that his hair stood up in a surprisingly thick brush; it was astonishing hair—such a lot of it, and so very upright!

As she gazed straight at his large round face wearing large round glasses, the hair—everything—a streak of moon gleamed through the clouds and she herself became distinguishable, her face as well as her dark coat. She wore no hat from the first, so that her face, earnest and puzzled, was just for a few seconds clearly visible.

The result was hardly what she expected.

" Oh, là, là, milles pardons, Mam'selle!" cried the little man as he swept his hat to the ground, then to his head, jammed it on over the upright hair, and bowed.

Then, before a word could be said, he turned and ran, bounding away with an agility you would not have expected or believed even possible.

" Talk about *dreams!*" said Camilla in a low voice, " is it a dream—am I awake?"

She shifted the parcel, tucking it under the other arm, right instead of left, and started back, walking towards the castle which was from here swallowed up in night. She did not run, because of the inequalities of the ground; it was so rough and covered with gorse roots, she had a vision of herself suddenly pitched on her face with a sprained ankle waiting for daylight.

So she walked fast, stepping high and wondering how she should get into the castle—the only way seemed to be rousing Pen and Pam, they wouldn't mind anyway—they would be thrilled with satisfaction, especially about the Guides and that fascinating *Blue Bird* yacht. Camilla's tired mind seemed to smile as she thought of the excitement at the castle; after all it was so funny, and as for stories! She felt so cheered up that nothing mattered, especially as the fall of the ground in front brought the black battlements and the towers into the picture again, inked against the clouds as before.

She stood still to try and see just where she was, and then was so startled that she jerked round with a light spring. Somebody was running after her, she heard a hard-drawn breath, and saw a black shadow take shape out of the night, then a voice said, or rather gasped:

"And—what did he say?" the question was asked in careful English, with an accent that betrayed the speaker as French at once.

But Camilla did not need to listen for an accent to realize who was the new-comer. A slim girl of her own height was the instant impression, then, a few seconds after, she knew she was face to face with Etoile de Ruvigny, the smuggler.

Camilla had no time to make up her mind even about her own opinions! She did not know what she thought or felt now, though she had believed she did when she was on the *Blue Bird* yacht. When one comes to

think of it, one's opinions are often rather *fluid* things, they rise and fall with happenings and the personality of people. In this case, when Etoile gasped in that soft plaintive voice:

" What *did* he say?" Camilla felt inclined to comfort and defend her, but pulling herself together, and making her own voice very civil, yet rather chilly, she answered, also in English:

" I do not know. I could not understand, because he spoke so fast. Besides, I was startled, he was so excited."

" Ah, oui, oui, oui," murmured Etoile, " he is mistaking you for *me*, you understand that?" She smiled enchantingly and her teeth shone. " It matters nothing at all then—but nothing. He is from Grand Colin, the village—eh? magasin—ah, I know, what you call the *shop* of the chemist—he is the pharmacien, druggist is it not? Eh bien! Very well, he bring me a message to our house—to the Mill of the Prince—then he see you and suppose that is me—so he run to you. He is mistaken, very well then, it is nothing if you are not offended, Miss—Miss——"

Camilla only half heard the hurried explanations, because she was gazing at Mrs. MacStinger, who seemed to have made herself fairly comfortable in the arms of the French girl, but was now struggling to get away, her ears flattened and an expression rather like an angry rattlesnake making her look extremely venomous.

" Oh, I'm Camilla Carmichael!" explained Cam, in

a hurried manner. " It's very odd being out now, but you see the cat ran away—she is our cat, and—and she's sure to feel strange. If you don't mind—I'm afraid she is scratching you—here, let me—I'll take her home. You see I was running after *her*, I'd no idea your home was here—Miss de Ruvigny, I *suppose* —I mean I don't know. Oh, Mrs. Mac, *don't*, you are tearing bits out of me!"

Camilla laughed nervously. She was acutely conscious of the ridiculous situation. You couldn't explain it properly, because people do not make a practice of wandering in search of cats after midnight.

She stopped explaining and grasped the cat. Mrs. MacStinger knew what she wanted and sprang from the stranger's arms to claw frantically at an old friend. Naturally down fell the parcel on to the heath between the girls, Camilla had forgotten it was tucked beneath her arm.

Etoile stooped and picked it up.

" Yours, is it not?" she asked, in her pretty accent as she held it towards Camilla.

The latter felt herself blush hotly, for one wild moment she did not know what to say and thought she must agree. Then her natural honesty won the day, and the conviction flashed across her mind that there is nothing so entangling as fibs or white lies; once you wander down a crooked path you are sure to lose your way.

She put out a protesting hand and gently pressed back the parcel.

"No," she said, rather hurriedly, "not mine. I found it, but I—I think it belongs to you, I mean to your friends—or—or someone."

For about a minute there was silence so deep that each girl could hear the other breathe, and Camilla listened almost dreamily to the far-off sound of water whispering over rocks and shoving aside heavy weed curtains.

"A *moi*, c'est drôle!" said the French girl, with a little rippling laugh that sounded the least bit affected.

Camilla stroked the cat, and withdrew a pace or two. Then, as the pause began to feel uncomfortable, she said politely:

"I really must go, my mother might be dreadfully anxious. You see I got locked out when—when I heard the cat mew, and I had to go round and try to get in another way. Honestly I'm not sure *how* I shall get in—unless my sisters hear me."

"You will call—is it so?" asked Etoile, walking slowly forward with her.

Camilla was just going to say that she would make the owl's cry, but checked the confidence.

"I shall call, yes," she agreed, "don't bother to come with me, I can see the towers. And thank you so very much for coming back with our Mrs. Mac, she's a great friend and if she had been lost there would have been dreadful woe. Please don't trouble to come farther, we shall meet again soon. My mother hopes Madame de Ruvigny will come and see us soon, and

please tell us if there is anything we—I mean anything you—you would like us to——"

Then, feeling rather entangled in polite phrases, Camilla broke into a run and sped towards the dark towers.

CHAPTER IX

Difference of Opinion

Less than an hour after Camilla started for the castle in earnest, she sat on a hassock with her head leaned against her mother's bed, while the assembled family discussed her amazing adventures.

Mrs. Carmichael, as usual undisturbed by the doings of her imaginative family, lay placidly attentive in her bed, occasionally putting the common-sense point of view when something especially wild was suggested. Claudia was the only daughter not present. As a matter of fact she had come down at first—that is, come down when the two younger ones answered the owl's cries from the top chamber.

No Carmichael would remain asleep when Camilla's strange wailing owl screams tore the stillness. June heard, understood, and remarked in her sleepy chirping voice:

" Mummy, wake up. One of ve aunties is makin' most *fearful* owl ones."

June knew all about the different bird calls indulged in by her relations.

" All right, darling," soothed Claudia, and got up to

try and see from her loophole, failing, because it looked seaward. Then she put on slippers and ran up the stone stairs to the top bedroom, finding Pen and Pam fluttering about excitedly.

They greeted her with gurgles and squeaks.

"It *must* be Cam, nobody else does the owl so splendidly, but where, *why*?"

"Oh, she's got shut out somehow and can't open the drawbridge gate!" cried Pam, skipping about on wires of thrills.

"Don't make such a noise," warned Claudia, "we must go down and open the gate."

"I only pray she won't fall through the holes in the drawbridge," said Pen quite cheerfully, "it really is a ghastly place and—I say, Pam, there are *two* of them."

"Two whats—two holes, or two Camillas?" asked Pam, hunting for her shoes.

"Idiot! There's someone—a person with a skirt on—just beyond the bridge, on the track that goes across the heath. It's not easy to make her out, but there was a gleam of light, then I saw there certainly was a person standing still looking at Cam."

Pam bounded to the window, hopping on one foot, while Claudia in a motherly manner hunted for the lost shoe.

"*Where?*" demanded the youngest girl, "Oh, yes—I do see a shape, but isn't it a bush? You bet it's a bush—gorsey one. Where's Cam? I can't see a spark of her; probably she's gone through the drawbridge, it's only a network of gashes held together by rotten boards."

" Hush!" ordered Claudia, " I hear something. Is this your shoe, Pam? I'm going down, you two. Cam must have been waiting there quite a long time."

She hurried out on to the stone stair that wound down and down, then they heard her expostulating with June, who had suddenly started to sing a hymn in a loud and rather manly voice. June always did sing hymns in moments of stress; Claudia thought she did it to support her own courage and fend off fears! They were always gloomy hymns, but that was because Bethia indulged in gloom of that kind, it was her way of expressing satisfaction.

The fact was that Pen and Pam were keenly interested in the watching person, who had apparently retreated from her end of the drawbridge and become more or less merged in the gorse clump.

" The more you look the more sure you are," declared Pam. " I say, Pen, are you certain it's not Cam herself—same shape and slimness?"

" What would she be standing there for? No sense —why?"

" She might be watching our window and expecting us to make a sign, or something," suggested Pam eagerly.

" Well, we *have* given the owl answer. All the same" —then without finishing her sentence Pen leaned from the loophole and gave out the queer haunting wail of the owl's cry " Tu-who-o—tu-who-o-o."

There was no reply.

After an observant pause Pam said:

" She went back into the gorse."

" How could you see?—*I* can't," came from Pen in a whisper.

" Well, anyway, it's no good sitting up here staring at nothing, my dear girl. Perhaps Cam knows—we'll ask her. Crikey, Pen, do come on, I'm vitally certain I can hear Cam's voice—somebody let her in."

When the pair of them got down to their mother's room they found Camilla already explaining with little gestures of her slim brown hands. Also there was Marcus, sitting Turkish fashion on the foot of the bed, saying little unless he was asked directly, and inclined to regard his sisters in a tolerant manner—all except Pam, who was always a friend and sympathizer.

" Marc let me in," said Cam in answer to Pen's eager question.

Marcus took up the explanation:

" Naturally I heard Cam's awful yells. Bethia didn't. She might as well be a winter bear, but I'll tell you who did—that pig of a cook."

" My dear child," expostulated his mother, " poor Michelle!"

" Mum dear, she's *not* poor," cried several voices, " she's sly—she's doing things without leave! Truly she's——"

" Let Marcus tell first. I want to hear it all. Go on, Marc, what about Michelle, only don't call her names, it's not kind—and always remember there may be

two sides to every question, we don't know *her* story."

Camilla raised her head, began to say something, checked it to:

"All right, you say first, Marc," and settled back again.

"*I* was simply going to say that hearing the owl call I got up and went into the brick room—our dining-room. I thought I heard someone moving in Michelle's place down below, but the whole bally show being yards thick you only get noises through windows, so one couldn't be sure of course. Anyway, I must have, because when I went down the steps from the door there was the cook peeping out from the kitchen steps where one goes down—you know, Mum?"

"Oh yes, I know, darling! Of course she heard you and came out to look."

"She was coming on her own, anyway," said Marcus. "I saw her jump when she caught sight of me and she scurried inside like a rabbit. Well, that's all really. I just went to the gate and looked through and there was Cam, so I unlocked it—the key was in it all right. I say, Mum, there must have been heaps of different kinds of bolts and locks since this castle first began! There are the old staples of bolts, and the rings where they had chains, and padlocks, and the lock they have now isn't *young*, it's a perfectly enormous box of tricks, but it's jolly well *oiled!* I suppose that Michelle female keeps it primed up. It's a wonder she hadn't bagged the key."

" I told her to leave it," said his mother, " that's to say, Claudia did. We like to have important keys in our own hands."

" Jolly good thing," commented the boy, and he looked across at Pam with a meaning expression. The girls knew he was reminding them of Michelle and the door in the outer wall above the rocks.

" Well," went on Mrs. Carmichael, changing the subject in a lighter tone, " and so that's *that*, and we know how dear Cam got in, but we don't know how she got out or where she went and we are dying to hear the whole adventure, which seems to be a regular cinema shocker. Come here, you two chickens, and sit on the bed, or anywhere; Cam must tell us the whole story if it takes till breakfast-time."

The party laughed, and two figures made a rush and established themselves gleefully. Then Claudia came in and sat on the floor by Camilla. She said she was dying to hear the whole story and Baby was going to sleep. Claudia was always optimistic about June, though invariably disappointed up to the present date.

Then, of course, Pam launched a question that upset the whole balance of the story, making it begin at the wrong end as it were! She could not help it, she was made that way.

" Just *one* moment, Cam," began the youngest sister anxiously, " was anyone behind you, by chance? I mean when you came on the drawbridge and waited, was there a *girl* on the track up by the gorse clumps?

Pen and I saw a girl, we thought she was you, about your size and all that, she seemed to be watching you. Well, considering the hour and—everything else, we simply couldn't imagine——"

There was a pause.

"Oh," said Cam thoughtfully, "she must have come after me! I wonder, I mean I don't see why, unless she was anxious about my being able to get in."

A breathless pause held the party.

"There was a girl then?" murmured Claudia.

Mrs. Carmichael put out a gentle hand and stroked Camilla's head. The head turned sideways and rubbed against the hand coaxingly, then Camilla said:

"*Girl*, my dear people! Why, there were five girls, and I've been hobnobbing with the whole lot."

A family gasp was audible. Cam continued.

"The last of the gang was Etoile de Ruvigny. I raced her to get the cat—I mean Mrs. MacStinger. *I* had her stockings, *dozens* of pairs! She had the cat. We exchanged. If she followed me I'm sure it was sheer kindness of heart, she said she could get me in, probably she was thinking of the cook. It sounds rather mad."

"*Mad!*" echoed Pam faintly, "never in my life had I even hoped for anything so topsy-turvy."

"It's the castle," murmured Pen, "what else could you expect?"

"*Alice through the Looking-Glass* is sound common-sense compared to it," remarked the mother of the family, raising herself on her elbow, "but look here,

children, no one must interrupt, not a word, please. Cam dear, begin at the actual beginning. I want to know how you came to start it, and just what you did. We will hear about the five girls later."

"And, Mummy, can we have them to tea?" put in irrepressible Pam.

"Hush, darling, of course, but don't talk now, please."

So Camilla began and continued to the end of her surprising adventure. The more she told, the more was she astonished herself to consider what she had done—what she had been through! More than once she put in "It's absolutely true" or "I'm not exaggerating one scrap, Mummy".

This was because the family sometimes had occasion to declare that Cam always saw "forty cats on the wall", when one cat sat in the sun. Cam was the most sincerely truthful and honest girl living, but she had a soul of romance, ordinary events were often picturesque and dream-like to her. Therefore, you see, she realized that her family might think she was touching up this account of her midnight doings, and took the greatest pains to tell her story simply.

"It sounds most awfully queer now I tell it," she interrupted herself when she came to the little fat man bouncing out of the gorse heath and demanding money, "but, you see, that is exactly what he did do. He mistook *me* for the de Ruvigny girl, you see. She said he did, and he would, when you come to think that the Windmill was close by there on the cliff top.

You can't see it from this tower, Mummy, because the moor humps up between. She—Etoile I mean—called it Le Moulin du Prince; I suppose it belonged to our darling Prince as well as this! Anyway, that's where they live—of course to save money, poor dears. It was perfectly natural that the little man with bottle-brush hair should think I was Etoile, he couldn't expect strange girls wandering on the heath, besides he seemed rather frantic, because he needed money—I'm sure it was money—as far as I could understand he thought Etoile was bringing some that belonged to him."

"Didn't you say Etoile said he was the chemist in the village?" questioned Claudia, "well, there you are! I expect *he* was the go-between for the medical things you saw. You know, you said the Guides told you drugs and saccharine."

"Gemini!" murmured Cam, "why, of course! And the wretched little person wanted payment for the goods they had put——"

"Put in *our* tower," added Pam, in a shocked voice. "I say, Cam, I do think these Guides are right. *Can* we have half the village concealing stolen goods in our castle?"

"Not *stolen* goods—bought from him," contradicted Camilla, "she doesn't steal."

"Oh, well—we don't know what she does," put in Pen with decision, "*I* must say one can't feel inclined to like her as much as you do—considering all things, I mean. It isn't good form to smuggle and plot with

fishermen—and—and *anybody* that will do it. We're poor but we don't smuggle and hide things."

"You haven't seen her," defended Camilla, raising her head alertly; "when you do you won't feel so cocksure about rights and wrongs. She *may* do it against her will, for her mother's sake. They must be awfully poor to live in a windmill, the utter stuffiness! Rooms about a yard square."

Cam had grown pink in her defence of that night vision. She could see the oval face with its delicate nose, rather high bridged, and dark eyes like pools. She remembered the flash of white teeth when the girl smiled. And then Etoile de Ruvigny must be just about her own age, just, seventeen to eighteen! That made a great difference, because Claudia, ten years older and married, seemed a long way off, while Pen and Pam were, after all, children—fourteen, thirteen—of course they were ripping girls, but still—how could they understand practically the full pinch of no money —they could not. Camilla could, because her mother talked a good deal to her, made a confidant of her when Claudia was far away.

Supposing Etoile's mother was one of the unpractical kind, or delicate! A hundred thoughts flowed through Cam's mind. She heard Claudia say that windmills had large rooms—she was sure. She had explored a windmill in Guernsey Island and it seemed huge. She heard Pen announce that large or small rooms made no difference to whether people were straight, and felt inclined to be a little sharp.

Then Marcus, who had listened silently, suddenly said that this French woman must be a jolly decent hand with a boat anyway.

" I don't mind her," he added, " I guess she can swim jolly well too. Sailing boats in these rocky bays would be no joke."

" Fearfully difficult," agreed Pam with respect, then: " I say, Cam, tell us exactly what you thought about those Sea Guides. I must say they are awfully exciting. Fancy coming over from England in their own yacht!"

" You'd better not call it a '*yacht*' to *them*," corrected Cam, " had they, Claud?"

Claudia shook her head.

" No, don't," she told Pam, who grunted unbelievingly, " only trippers and amateurs talk about 'yachts'. You can call her by her name, or her rig—a yawl, you said, Cam, didn't you? Well, that would do, or boat, or craft. People who really sail no more call their craft 'yachts' than they wear complete yachting suits with shining buttons and peaked caps. Any old thing does, but you simply *can't* dress up."

Marcus listened to these words of wisdom in silence; Pam murmured:

" Sounds rather silly," and a pause fell on the stone room.

A pause broken by Marcus as he said in a shocked voice:

" I *say*, Claudia, look at your kid."

And there was June in the doorway, wonderfully

small and Japanesy in a gaily flowered sleeping suit, her dark hair standing up in a riot of silken curls, and her pencilled eyebrows drawn together with a responsible frown.

" I got on my flippers," she informed the company, glancing down at a foot the size of a doll's. " Auntie Pam, your gurl what hid in ve bush came down on ve gate bwidge—I saw her, she came when you was gone downstairs and she stayed ages an' *ages*. I couldn't see any more, 'cause ve wall doesn't let us. My neck isn't so long as vat."

Claudia gave a gasp. Pam said:

" Baby, did you lean out of the window as far as you could?"

Pen added quickly:

" Oh, Baby, how *naughty!*"

" I'm not naughty," retorted June, a quiver making itself heard in a voice otherwise firm, " it's better when anybody knows where ve gurl goes to, an' she comes on ve bridge. I *saw* her come. I'm not silly, am I, Mummy?"

" No, my lamb, but suppose you fell out of that loophole down the wall it would be dreadful," answered Claudia, trying her best to remember her theory, that one must never fuss over children whatever they did, and never even let them suspect you had fears.

" She's gone now—ve gurl I mean," added June, " I espect she's gone to bed."

" Jolly good thing too," said Pam, " *I* call it blazing cheek to come messing round our castle this time of

night. Considering they've *let* it to us, I must say the de Ruvigny people are rather, well—rather fulsome."

" Suppose you all go to bed now," suggested Mrs. Carmichael, " I can't say one word, for the simple reason that I truly do not know what to say—well, except that let's keep our adventures to day-time as much as possible—in future. Let us make friends with the Guides and mind our own business about the de Ruvigny affairs—on no account must we barge in upon this stocking and drug affair. We have taken the castle and there it ends; it must end with Michelle—by the way, she has got to understand that her work does not include parcel storing."

So the family conclave broke up, sleepy but thrilled, for not one of the whole party believed this could be the end of the smuggling mystery.

CHAPTER X

Under-currents

One thing only in addition happened on that odd night, or morning. When the sleepy family dispersed Marcus dived from the room with a lively energy no one else felt, and disappeared, intent on a thought of his own. Later, he told Pam that he wanted to prove, if possible still more decisively, that Etoile and the cook were partners in this business, so noting what June had said about the girl coming on to the drawbridge, he sped back to the big room with the brick floor in time to see Michelle disappear down the kitchen steps carrying a square packet beneath her arm.

Pam, opening her eyes wide, nodded impressively.

"I'm afraid I can*not* care about that female," she told her brother, "and as for Etoile—she may be lovely—Cam is carried away by her nose and her teeth—she positively can't see that it's not decent to use people's cooks to make plots with."

"Well, Michelle was her cook first," reasoned Marcus in a broad-minded voice.

"She's ours now, and we pay her," said Pam sharply,

"Etoile isn't a sport. She must have brought the stockings along to Michelle, on the chance of her coming out to the gate! It's obvious. If I'd been Cam I would have brought the key away to Mummy; they couldn't push the stockings through, so they would have had trouble for nothing. Now I suppose Michelle will get that packet to her husband—unless he's gone already. I hope the Sea Guides will get it away from him."

"They can't," said Marcus, without enthusiasm. "Etoile is an ass to go on like this even if she makes a few francs, but the Sea Guides would be worse if they tried to get things from her by force. They'd be pirates, naturally."

Pam, though, was not sure. She had a feeling that Sea Guides were empowered to seize ships and handcuff criminals, she had immense respect for them, while poor Etoile was simply nowhere in this matter.

The next few days then, with this amazing state of things in the background, were very exciting.

Mrs. Carmichael and Claudia went to see the Comtesse de Ruvigny and asked her and Etoile to tea, nay more, to a very nice lunch, cooked in perfect style by Michelle and waited on by Bethia.

The odd part in the first place was that Camilla would not go to the Windmill. She said to her mother:

"If you don't mind, Mummy, *please* not," and to Claudia she said, if she did she "would feel like a blithering idiot."

" Hum—well, *she* would, I should think," answered the elder sister.

" But you can't guess, Claud, how *mad* it all was," explained Cam, a puzzled frown puckering her delicate eyebrows. " The boats and the rocks, the racing and whispering, the cat and the parcel, all in the middle of the night! Afterwards I couldn't think how I did it, and I felt fearfully ashamed, because really it isn't done, is it?"

" One gets dragged into funny affairs sometimes, of course," allowed Claudia, " but, my dear Cam, what about the girl herself? *She* was the root of it all. Don't you think if you came you would make her feel less uncomfortable? After all, she was hiding things in this castle only two days ago! I think she is the one to feel miserable, and if you came too and were friendly it would all pass off smoothly. You could both laugh about it and ignore the illegal part."

But Cam held to her idea. What she said was perfectly true.

" Etoile would not laugh. She has no sense of humour at all—of that kind. She might be heroic, but she couldn't make jokes. Let it wear off a bit, Claud, and we'll just see what happens later. I dare say she may stop doing it. I hope so, anyway. I'd never betray her, or work against her, because she's a perfect dear, but it's no use pretending to think she'll laugh over it; she won't, she's awfully serious."

Claudia understood that it probably would be so. This girl Etoile was fearless and unselfish, beloved by

her own people, but she lived in a world of wild romance and the funny side of life could not appeal to her, because she never saw it.

So Camilla got her way and the elders went to the Windmill, fell in love with the quaint place, with the thin, worn, whitefaced lady and the very square old servant Célonie, who had been Etoile's nurse. The girl they did not see, she was out, but they saw the garden she had made, her two little goats, and the odd beauty of the rooms, one on each floor and quite round except for the narrow stair, little better than a ladder, that went up one side and was lighted by the hole out of which the big sails had once swung round.

It was a first-class place for a windmill anyway—that is a working mill—because there was bound to be wind always on the cliff of that gorge, the river below with its strong tide rising and falling creating breeze like a bellows. Truly the Moulin du Prince was a most arresting place. Though not nearly as old as the castle, no doubt it ground for Geffroy's stronghold in the Middle Ages.

Mrs. Carmichael and Claudia came away full of interest, full of liking, having made conversation to the best of their ability, but, of course, no wiser about Etoile's mysterious employments. Nor did they dare to ask questions about the cook Michelle, or hint that she was in the habit of doing a great deal more than mere cooking.

"One couldn't," said Claudia. And it certainly was extremely difficult.

They reached the castle in time for tea, and as they drew near to the drawbridge realized much laughter and gay voices within the courtyard.

The big gate in the arch was shut as usual, but the little wicket gate in the big one was open, and Marcus came through it to meet them.

"The whole place is a mass of girls, Mum," he announced without enthusiasm, and then added, as though a thought gave that fact more interest, "of course their yawl is a ripper; you don't mind our going out on her, do you, Mum? She's absolutely safe."

"I must think," was the answer, and then, "where are they? The Sea Guides, I suppose, Marc?"

"Yes, and they're going to have tea, four of them. You see we were in the tower Cam found, looking out of the window to see the *Blue Bird*, then they saw us and told us to come down the steps and they'd fetch us off to see their yacht—I mean yawl. We got the key out of Michelle. I say, Mum, she really *is* a prize liar, she vowed she hadn't got it! We told her we knew she had, then she came along and unlocked the gate, then Cam got the key—we really ought to have that key, you know, Mum, it's jolly extreme cheek her thinking she can lock up our castle, isn't it? Well, anyway, Cam would not go on the yawl without asking you; instead she got all the females up here to see the castle inside. They like it awfully. They aren't at all bad, Mummy."

"*I* think they are splendid," said his mother warmly.

"I should not mind you and the others having sails on the *Blue Bird*; after all, you can swim."

So said Mrs. Carmichael in the happy way people speak who know nothing at all about it, and her words were received with great joy by Marcus, who knew even less.

Then they went into the big room and the four Sea Guides were introduced by Cam, who was thrilled with the excitement of it all, and the queer possibilities being revealed.

Mrs. Carmichael took to the Skipper on the instant. They looked into one another's eyes and Fred felt herself thinking "what a splendid mother to have". Not remembering her own, she felt at that moment a pang in realizing what she had missed.

There was a great deal of conversation, but no allusion to the odd adventures of the night. The Skipper was as circumspect as she was nice, and knew just how to avoid talk that might make trouble, but her piercing grey eyes took count of Michelle Lemoyne, who had surpassed herself almost in producing at short notice a tea that did justice to the party. Mrs. MacStinger sat in the window-seat, staring with half-shut eyes at the castle court. What she thought, who can say? But she did not like the cook, *that* was plain as the brick floor.

Well, apart from cats, the afternoon went very well, the castle looking a very picture of dream romance when it was shown off by the proud occupiers after tea.

As the whole party looked down on the *Blue Bird*

from the tower at the west front corner, they understood from the inside what they knew already from the sea, and then occurred one of those little incidents which may or may not mean trouble.

Pat said as she drew her head inside the loophole.

"Look here, Skipper, isn't that the French girl viewing our *Blue Bird* exhaustively? She's jolly inquisitive."

Several heads were thrust within range, but cautiously.

"Yes," allowed Camilla, "I expect she's admiring the yawl with all her heart. She understands boats."

"Good thing you locked the companion door, Fred," said Lesley, "look at her standing in her own boat staring over the counter! By the way, is that the boat she sails; it's much too big for a dinghy."

"I think she's only got one," Cam told them, "it looks bigger when the mast is up. It's fairly long, isn't it, Skipper?"

As she ventured to use the title Frederica turned her head and smiled her very pleasant smile.

"Yes, Camilla," she answered, "when she hoists her little lug-sail it would be quite a yacht—well-built little craft—I'd put her at twelve feet. Stiff work rowing out from the river channel with the wind against her, though she had the tide fair. You watch and you'll see her put up her mast to set sail for home. Well, there is no harm in her looking at *Blue Bird*—everyone looks at her."

As Etoile shoved herself off by pushing against the

yawl, the girls in the tower drew their heads out of sight. Nevertheless they saw Etoile watching the east tower with interest as she floated alongside the *Blue Bird*, but apparently she did not see what she watched for, as within a few minutes she set up her little mast, which seemed no bigger than a broom handle from above, hauled out her absurd little lug-sail—a three-cornered bit of canvas—and, sitting in the stern to steer, the sheet twisted round a cleat close at hand, she manœuvred in the smartest manner to catch the breeze from the south and ran over the water in the daintiest fashion, just as a swallow skims low.

" She *is* clever," said Camilla warmly.

The Skipper glanced at her, a little smile in her eyes.

" Oh, very!" she agreed, but the way she said it made Pen and Pam look at her in turn.

" Wonder what she *really* wanted?" whispered Lesley to her sister as they explored the passage between the front towers.

But Pat only closed one of her bright green eyes, murmuring:

" Wait and see, my dear, you won't find any flies on that young person," which really was rather vulgar, considering a Guide's training.

In any case that visit ended most joyfully; everyone pleased and everyone looking forward to vivid excitements connected with the *Blue Bird*, for Mrs. Carmichael made it plain that she did not intend to interfere with these hopes and chances.

Camilla declared afterwards that all the things that

happened were "fate", nor did anyone contradict her, because no one knew anything about it except Mrs. Carmichael, who was wise in experience at any rate. She said that the longer you lived the more sure you would be that everything that happened had a consequence. You could call it fate if you chose, but the simple truth was that, if you had not done the act that came before the next thing would not have occurred.

"It's a law," she said, "and must be so," interrupting her own reading aloud to the assembled family as they all sat in the shade of the ramparts after dinner the next day, "consequently, my chickens, think well before you do, or even say anything, because you cannot tell where or when it is going to end."

The only person who made a comment was June, who, half asleep on Claudia's knee, said in a chirping voice:

"Ven I pinch Mrs. Mac on her tail she sticks her nails in me an' a bleed comes. Mummy, look, I got a most *awful* place on my leg."

"If you hadn't pinched Mrs. Mac she wouldn't have stuck nails in your leg," said Claudia; "it was your fault."

"I know," allowed June, closing her big eyes. "All same, Mummy, I shall pinch her next time."

Everybody laughed. Mrs. Carmichael said:

"That's just what people do, and then call it fate."

Camilla thought about Etoile de Ruvigny and her reasoning followed June's.

" *She* will go on pinching Mrs. Mac till she gets a really bad scratch. Oh dear, how stupid people are!"

Mrs. Carmichael went on reading.

Well, to get on with this odd story.

Etoile and her mother came to tea next day, and the Carmichaels did everything possible to make them feel really at home and happy, yet any sensitive person could *feel* that the girl carried in her heart a sense of resentment against these English girls who were living in her beloved castle and taking its supreme joys as a matter of course. " Just because they could pay for them," thought Etoile, not the least understanding the immense difficulties and pluck of this English family. Because they came from rich England they must be rich! That was what she believed, and though she and her delicate handsome mother wished to let their castle, Etoile felt bitter enmity to those who had it. She was rather like Mrs. Mac perhaps! She felt as though she had been pinched, and she wanted to make long scratches in the scratchiest manner possible. Perhaps the biggest pinch of all was the arrival of these surprising Guides in a yawl that she envied with all her courageous heart. " What a vessel! Oh, là, là!" thought Etoile, and she, who was as good a sailor, must be content with a morsel of a boat and a sail like a handkerchief. It was enough to break the heart!

The result was that Etoile found herself angry, passionately angry, beneath her charming outside, all the more so because Camilla had given back to her that parcel of stockings, pointing to an idea that she

had found them in the west tower where Michelle put all the goods.

No corner of her castle was free from the prying of these people, thought Etoile, in fact she had given way to an unreasonable state of mind, encouraged on every occasion by the two old servants, Célonie at the Windmill and Michelle Lemoyne at the castle, both of whom were afflicted with touchy tempers and had had their own way too long with a frail mistress like the Comtesse and a girl they had managed from a baby in the lonely stronghold.

Do not imagine for one moment that Etoile was disagreeable in manner. On the contrary she was quite charming, most of all to Mrs. Carmichael and Camilla.

The tea passed off very well; Etoile declined to go out on the ramparts or see the girls' rooms, in fact the only thing she suggested was that she must speak to Michelle.

" Poor Michelle," she said, with a little shrug, " it is necessary that I talk to her a short while, otherwise——" her raised eyebrows and the outflung gesture of her slim hands implied that otherwise poor Michelle would be badly hurt, offended, something of that kind. So no one could object and Michelle came up from her kitchen to see Etoile; they walked in the courtyard and there was an end of the matter, it was all perfectly natural, of course.

Before she went away the French girl said to Mrs. Carmichael that she much wished the girls could see the Fairies' stone on the hill, nearly opposite the

Windmill, over the river. She explained that this stone was old—*old*—so old that Saint Augustine had spoken of the fairies as "Our Déhussets spirits from the Deep"; some called them "Dhusi", or "Duzik", and said that was the name given them by the Saint. In any case it was known that the fairies came to dance round the great rocking stone when the moon was full, and that was, of course, the time to go.

Said Etoile, looking very sweet, could Camille ask her friends of the *Blue Bird* to join the party, why not? Would it not be possible for that so lovely yacht to come round and anchor in the river? The party could sleep on board, why not? Then there would be no trouble of returning late.

"Oh, Mummy," said Cam, "what a tip-top spree!"

Mrs. Carmichael smiled in friendly fashion and said: "But all depends on the Skipper, and the weather. *I* promise nothing."

CHAPTER XI

What the Frog Footman Said

During the next few days something happened that would not have happened had people been careful, as they ought to be, but the general excitement over Etoile's brilliant idea about the moonlight excursion to the Fairies' Stone, and the general eagerness to get the Guides in agreement caused that something to happen in this way.

As we know, Cam had possession of the key to the rock steps postern gate. She took it from Michelle and put it in her bedroom, in her writing-table drawer.

As we know, also, that stair was the short cut to the rocks and the moorings of *Blue Bird*. Therefore, when Pen and Pam became obsessed with the idea of that joint expedition they wanted to confer with the Guides at once, and they took the key from Cam's room without a thought of not putting it back. Cam had gone to the village with her mother; they had forgotten to ask, not realized perhaps till too late, and then could not wait.

Mum had said they could ask the Skipper. When they reached the door it was locked. Cam had the

key! So they raced to her room, searched, found it, and went off to open the gate in the wall.

Pam had the key in her pocket, and when they had passed through she locked the door again on the outside. That was a brilliant idea of Pam's, so she thought, anyway. Pen was already going slowly down the rock steps when Pam tried to pull the key out and it wouldn't come. It seemed to be caught, hitched in the keyhole, while she was in a hurry. She called out to Pen:

"I say, the key sticks in the door."

Pen turned her head half-way.

"Leave it till we come back. It's quite all right. Hurry up, Pam, they are putting off the dinghy; it will do when we come back, we shall have to go in again."

This was sound reasoning—they would have to go in again, so Pam left the key in the closed door and hurried down joyfully after her sister.

Pat and Lesley were waiting in the dinghy and great was the joy of the meeting, Pen bursting out with the story of the Fairies' Stone and the invitation of Etoile de Ruvigny.

"It would have to be at night, you see, next week, she says one can only see it in an effective manner by moonlight. And—and Etoile wondered if you people would join in and let *us* sleep on board *Blue Bird*—oh well, just put ourselves up, you know," explained Pen hastily, feeling that it really was rather a large order to ask the Guides to accommodate three girls and

Marcus. " Pam and I thought we'd come down and break it to you, so the Skipper could have time to think it over. Mummy and Cam have gone to the village, so we thought we'd come this way and just hail you and have a talk, but we can't stop now, because of the key."

" You see," broke in Pam eagerly, her clear voice sounding distinctly over the misty stillness of the calm water, " you see, we got the key from Cam's room—she has charge. We opened the door, and now the idiotic old thing is sort of stuck in its own rust and stops in the door, we couldn't pull it out. Really, my dear things, we must go back. We are responsible for the key."

Lesley made inviting gestures towards the dinghy.

" Come on," she suggested, " we can't say a thing till we've asked the Skipper—we are under orders. Let's get over to the yawl; what is the good of talking it over here when we cannot give you an answer?"

Pen hesitated and glanced nervously up the steps towards the door.

" But really," began Pam.

Then Pat Anson cut the Gordian knot.

" We are absolutely frittering valuable time and getting no joy out of it," she said, " I'm going up to fetch that key—it's like the story of Hansel and Gretel when they took away the house door on their backs to keep the house safe! We shall not get a word of sense out of you two till you have that key round your necks. Wait a sec, Les, I'll be back in two jiffs," and

she sprang away, going full speed up the steep rocky stair.

" Oh, I say—no, please!" called Penelope.

" Pat—Pat!" shouted Pam, and went off after her.

Lesley and Pen watched uneasily; Pamela was grandly active, but thirteen had not the same chance as long-legged seventeen, so Pat got to the postern gate first by some yards.

" Out you come," she said distinctly, and struggled with the rusty key.

" Here, I say, Pat," Pam was protesting, close at her heels.

And then the key did come out, of course before it was expected! Came out with such a jerk that Pat might have had a serious accident had not Pam been close to her and borne the brunt of her tumble. They both fell, they both gripped the rock and held on giggling, trying to get a firm hold, but slipping and twisting.

Lesley and Pen came running up, nearly losing the dinghy thereby, Lesley just saving the situation by jumping down in time to hook the boathook into the receding bows.

" I say, that was a near thing," said Pen; " you might have broken your necks on these rocks. I thought you were both smashed; here, give me the key; Pam, you really are a lunatic."

" Pat," said Pamela, rubbing her shins with careful touches and screwing her nose up, " *Oh*, my bruises! I say, how hard stones are! I shall be blue and green.

Pat, give Pen the key, will you, it will keep her quiet."

"Sorry," answered Pat, also feeling her bones cautiously, "it's gone!"

"*Gone!*" both the castle girls gave one cry, "gone where?"

"Wish I knew, dear people. I had it in my hand when Pam seized me by the hind leg."

"I did not," protested Pam, hotly, "I was simply trying to get to the door first."

"The effect was the same," went on Pat; "you jerked me and the wretched key simply *flew*. I heard a *ping* sound as it hit some rock or other, and—well—there you are. You can't get in, my child, so you two will have to sleep on *Blue Bird* now."

"Impossible," retorted Pam, flushing pink, "look here, do be nice and key-hunt with us. Here, Pen, do look. It's really ghastly losing the key, and you know it's close by—we simply cannot take this coolly."

"Well then, take it warmly, dear child," said Pat, in a coaxing voice, "but *do* be reasonable. You are locked out just as your sister was—we took her home and we'll take you home, honour bright we will, all you have to do is to come on board *Blue Bird* and have tea—heaps of tea—then we'll take you home in glaring daylight. We *promise*. If Mrs. Carmichael asks for you they'll all guess you are here, inviting us. If your sister comes down she will see you on board and be at peace."

"How can she see when she can't open the door?" demanded Pam in what Pen called a "wan" voice.

PAT AND LESLEY WERE WAITING IN THE DINGHY

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" She can look out of a loophole," answered Pat. " why not? She can call out ' little sisters, where, oh where——?' "

" Shut up, you blithering—beg pardon! Oh dear, what a fearful nuisance," came from poor Pam, " my conscience feels awful. You people can't think what a beast I consider myself; it's all my fault. *I* took that key."

" We took that key," put in Pen, her pretty pale face growing pink; " if we can't find it Mummy will have to get a new key made, that's the real bother, because it costs money. For the present we can't go in or out by that door, but then nobody else can either, so that's that, my dear girl. If *Blue Bird* is kind enough to ask us to tea let us say ' thank you ' and enjoy ourselves with all our might and main. That's my notion."

Pen's notion was adopted, Pamela deciding to " sit on her conscience for the present ", as she called some mental process peculiar to herself.

Anyway Pen's notion was adopted, and after a search up and down the rock stair, the four of them rowed off to *Blue Bird* and went on board.

Pen and Pam explained with a sort of anxious nervousness. Both took the blame, neither suggested that Pat had anything to do with it. The Skipper, however, understood, spoke words of comfort and invited the two to stay as long as they could; as to the invitation, she accepted for *Blue Bird* and her crew, saying they would take the yawl round into the river

channel, throw out their anchors if no moorings were available, and be ready for a good-sized moon.

"Any moon would do really," added Fred, just as though she were talking about hats or shoes—of course necessaries for her yawl were far more important!

That was a grand tea. All the Guides except Nell were first-rate cooks, that is, plain, useful cooks, "good enough for all nautical purposes", as Pat said. They made delightful things on the little oil-stove. Nell would not do galley work at any price, because the heat peeled the skin off her face, she said, also there was so little room that one got stiff!

That was what she *said*, but the others realized from experience that Nell Blake was not keen on doing her share in any department, much preferring to sit or lie on deck. However that was, the others made no comment, as it is no part of a Guide's job to criticize other folk, but certainly it made Fred appreciate the splendid good-tempered energy of the Anson sisters. The buns and scones made by them were a triumph at this particular tea, while the whole arrangement of the yawl inside and out called forth such enthusiasm from the visitors that even Pat was satisfied.

The Carmichael sisters heard a great deal about weather, tides, and prospects of sailing. They wanted to sail, of course, and were the least bit surprised when the Skipper informed them that to sail one requires wind, that she would not go out in a fog when the tide was ebbing, and that this was a dangerous coast in stormy weather. The whole science of sailing was

hidden from them, so they listened in astonishment at the wonders of Frederica's knowledge.

They had heard about the *Blue Bird's* beauties from Cam, but what girls from the North-west would call the " cuteness " of her convenient neatness was a revelation. A place for everything, large or small, and what was more to the purpose, each thing was exactly in its own place. From tea-spoon to water-tank it was perfect.

They were shown the forecastle, pronounced " foksel ", in which they would sleep if they came to stay a night. It was a long cabin in the bows, and being in the bows, of course, it narrowed to the front in a point. Each side was a bunk, and each side below that bunk was a long deep locker for storing spare sails.

Air came in through a hatchway in the fore-deck, this being reached by a tiny flight of steps hooked on to the square rim of the hatch.

None of the girls could stand upright, but that was a small matter; you cannot expect palatial height on a ten-ton yawl, but the comfort was unquestionable and a spirit of adventure seemed to breathe from the whole lovely fabric. The Carmichael girls felt it, just as they felt the gorgeous soul of the castle—you do, if you are built that way!

Tea being over, the girls sat on in the little saloon with the door open into the cockpit well, and the sound of the muttering tide in their ears. The whole bay lay wrapped in that sort of pearl-white fog that settles on everything in very tiny crystals. Warm wind

off the land on a cold incoming tide will make it sometimes, but it has the most mysterious way of coming in from the far horizon and driving landwards in a white wall, gradually hiding everything in soft wet folds.

Morning or evening it often came into the bays, drifting up the river channel to the hamlet of Le Petit Colin, while above it rose the weird shape of the sailless windmill, the ruins of the chapel of Ste. Magloire on the opposite side of the gorge, and at the outer bluff the towers of Geffroy fortress looking down into the clouds of billowing white that hid the rocks and the fishing-boats in La Tasse bay.

Because of this sea-fog the little saloon seemed the best place for a conversazione, as Pat called the pleasant yarning that followed that pleasant tea.

"But really we ought to go," protested Penelope, glancing at her wrist.

"Think of the fo'c'sle bunks and stop here," suggested Lesley, yawning lazily, "these mists really do squench one's energy about moving. We really can't do a thing, can we, Skipper? We——"

She checked speech and listened.

Everyone listened and the eyes of each girl seemed to question the girl opposite.

Then Pam sat up.

"You bet it's Marc," she said to Pen.

"Who is Marc?" asked the Skipper.

"Our brother Marcus. It's his voice. But I say, *how*? Is he calling from a loophole or what, because

we know he can't get through the postern door?"

Pat sprang for the cockpit with the others at her heels.

Outside there was mist, mist in a shifting veil, a little sunshine behind it, and the masses of brown rock and cliff battlements showing through.

"Hullo-o-o," hailed Pat with full power.

"Hullo-o-o-o," came a positive howl from somewhere, so far as their ears told the girls, certainly not from the loopholes. The sound appeared near at hand.

"*Blue Bird* ahoy," called the voice, which surely belonged to Marcus.

Then, as the soft veil of ragged mist drifted before some tidal air, the girls saw a small strong figure standing on the rock stairs, not far from the bottom! They might have seen it sooner, but they were looking in the wrong direction—up at the veiled walls of the castle, in fact.

There came a cry from Pam as she caught sight of her brother, then:

"Marc, I *say*—how on earth did you get there?"

"Same way as you did, down the steps."

There was tolerant contempt in the answer.

"But, my good child, how could you get through the door?"

"What door?"

"Why, the gate at the top—the gate in the wall?"

"Why shouldn't I come through it, my good idiot?" retorted Marcus with still stronger traces of contempt in his tone.

" Because it's *locked*, of course."

There was a pause, then the boy said:

" I don't know what on earth you are talking about," this time there was almost a plaintive tone in the protest, " Mum wondered where you'd got to. Cam guessed you'd gone to ask the *Blue Bird* people about the Fairy Stone job. So I came down to see, and——"

" Did you ask Cam for the key?" called Pen.

" I didn't ask anybody anything, I simply came here in the usual way," answered the boy, pronouncing the last few words rather slowly and with emphasis.

" Well—I *am* jiggered," remarked Pam, with a sigh.

" You sound as if you were," said Marcus, " though why on earth you expected me to jump out of a loop-hole or over the battlements——"

" Look here," Pen interrupted what had become almost a hot argument, " does Mummy want us, Marc?"

" She'll know you are all right when I tell her, of course. " I'll say you are both safe on *Blue Bird*; naturally she won't mind."

The Skipper recognized the compliment and broke into the conversation.

" Marcus, will you ask your mother to lend us Pen and Pam for the night? We've got bunks for them in the fo'c'sle; now they are here we should love to keep them and introduce them to our doings. Also, will you tell Camilla that we shall be glad to come round to the river and see the Fairy Stone, any night she chooses; if you will stop on board with us then we shall be very

pleased. You won't mind a tight pack, will you? Perhaps Camilla will come too?"

"Thanks *awfully*," was the fervent answer, and Marcus was heard pattering up the rock steps.

Pam shouted after him:

"Marc, *beg* Mummy to let us stop."

"Right you are," came a cry from high up, and then all the girls heard distinctly the lifting of the heavy door latch, the squeak of a rusty hinge, then a slam, and silence.

"I'm wet," said Pen, retreating to the saloon. Pam followed her.

"I say, how utterly mad about that door, I simply cannot think——"

Pat Anson dropped down the companion steps in convulsions of giggles and collapsed on a locker.

"What on earth?" began Lesley, then, "Oh, shut up, you lunatic."

Pat choked and coughed.

"Oh, I say, it's exactly like the Frog Footman in *Alice!* Les, don't you remember? 'I shall stop here for days and days,' said the Frog Footman, and then he opened the door and went in—it was so utterly *senseless*, just like us; there were we, absolutely fighting on those steps, when the door was *not* locked the whole time. We can all walk in if we want"—she went off in shrieks of giggles again.

"Oh, but the real bother is that the key is lost. I wish to goodness the door *was* locked—tight," said Penelope.

" But why, my dear girl?" Pat sat up and wiped her eyes.

" We don't *want* the door open, and now it's bound to be open till Mum can get a new key," answered Pam, " I'm not pleased, are you, Pen?"

" Rather not, I'm *sick*," agreed Pen with fervour.

CHAPTER XII

"You never know your Luck!"

There is an immense amount of amusement to be got out of going to bed on a small yacht, and when six girls are packed into all sorts of dainty little bunks in all sorts of cosy corners the satisfaction is greatly increased.

In this particular case the messenger returned in a very short time. The excited girls heard a click when the postern gate opened, and then a voice through the mist that seemed thicker even than at first.

"I say—Pam!"

"What-ho, Marc!"

"Mummy says you can stop—she sends her love, she thinks it's jolly kind."

That was all. Marcus retreated.

"It's awfully kind of your mother to trust us with you; anyway, we'll look after you all right," the Skipper declared.

"We'll *try* to," added Pat, heaving a sigh, "but you never know your luck, and really——"

"Really what?" asked her sister.

"Well, it's not easy to say, and honestly, my friends, I do think that this bay, this castle, these rocks—in

fact, the whole place added up is liable to spring surprises on harmless folk like us!"

"Have you got one of your 'hunches'?" inquired Lesley, and the Carmichael girls both felt the least little thrill, they could not have explained why.

"A 'hunch' is a sort of foreboding, isn't it?" asked Pen, "I've read about it in books that have cowboy adventures."

"Not necessarily *foreboding*," explained the Skipper cheerfully, "that means bad luck, doesn't it? A hunch means a premonition; for instance, you might feel dead sure in your mind that you are going to hit on a gold-mine, or open oysters with pearls in them, or find the key of your door up there! You would not know it, of course, but you'd feel it. That's a hunch."

"Well, I've got a frightfully strong hunch that we shall want stacks of supper to-night," said Pat, "so I vote Les and I start on making fried eggs and bacon enough to cover the deck, they'll be really needed. One thing that forces one's hunger up to starvation pitch is doing nothing. Here have we been sitting for hours doing nothing but wonder what we are going to eat next! It's awful! Skipper, may the others make up bunks? Les and I will handle a frying-pan with that deft touch for which we are famous."

For half an hour or more *Blue Bird* hummed like a hive. At the end of the time the fo'c'sle was most inviting, and the smell of supper was enough to make Pat's description come true.

In the early half of July, as we all know, the sun

sets soon after eight o'clock, but this night was hardly a fair test, because the sky had been shut out by grey haze all day, and now the mist clung on steadily.

The whole bay was closed into a soft gloom and stealing shadows were everywhere. Over all brooded the battlements of the old stronghold, and the breathless silence made one feel as though the bay were waiting. In the cove of La Tasse within the curve of the point to the east the fishing-boats lay quite still on the still water, wrapped in cloaks of mist, asleep on a sea of looking-glass; presently they would be resting on rippled sand, but that would be during the morning hours, when the tide was low; so far the creeping water had not arrived at its full height.

Pen and Pam had cherished a hope, which was to sleep on deck. As, however, the mist continued to wet the deck and rigging persistently, they had to content themselves with the bunks in the long fore-cabin, and there they went to bed arrayed in the convenient sleeping-suits lent by the Guides.

You had no fear of falling out, because there was a rim to the edge, but it was the sort of thing you had to get used to, as there was so little room, also the mattress was not soft! In any case, Pam would not have slept at once, for she was of an excitable temperament, and her big eyes felt extremely wide open as she stared at the low boards so close down and the neat arrangements for stowing away all and sundry properties. Pen went to sleep. Pam listened to the soft lapping of water round the bows and the whispering

of a thousand tiny wave voices. She was always full of dreams and thoughts like Camilla, making stories and pictures out of the things she saw. Here then was a new world of stories, and Pamela lay listening and thinking long after all noise of human activity ceased on board the yawl.

Her bunk was on the port side, so that the fore hatch was a little nearer to her bed than Pen's; perhaps that is not the case on all yachts, but it was so in that of *Blue Bird*, the hatch was not actually in the centre. She could see the streak of red light from the port shroud, because the Skipper kept both port and starboard lights going as well as the white riding light on the front of the mast head. This was not strictly usual, of course, but Fred was a very careful master and a little afraid of possible collisions with strange fishing-boats around them in strange waters. It need not for one moment be supposed that the Skipper was nervous of anything but her *paint!* The long white fenders hung out in place, but every sailor knows the almost extravagant respect owing to paint, so they will understand *Blue Bird's* lights being shown in such conditions.

Having done all possible, the Skipper went to bed. Everybody, in fact, turned in and slept soundly except Pamela, who was thrilling with fresh ideas and finding her bunk rather restricted.

Presently she heard a fresh noise. In some odd way it appeared to be connected with the moorings and the cable, which, of course, was attached to the bows

quite close to Pamela's head. For those who have little experience it may be well to explain that a fisherman's moorings often consist of a big stone—very big, very heavy—that is, if they cannot afford an anchor. Strong moorings belonging to better found vessels may be *two* anchors set in the sea bottom some distance from one another; at right angles to each of these is fastened a chain—a good many yards of chain —and to the chains linked together a very strong rope made of plaited grass, to which is fastened the little keg or baulk of wood that floats to show where the moorings are fixed.

In the case of *Blue Bird's* anchorage, she had picked up the little black-and-white striped barrel belonging to a fishing-boat that was laid up for repair after smashing herself on rocks in a spring gale. The moorings were of the kind described, a tough grass cable chiefly, and a chain, also an anchor in the sand. Durable enough for summer and fair weather, of course, especially as the yawl carried two fine anchors of her own and a chain running over a cute little winch in the bows. She used the moorings, however, to save trouble, as putting down and pulling up your own anchors is infinitely more trouble. All these things would be Greek to Pam, naturally; she knew that *Blue Bird* was held to an anchor, and that a strong cable of hemp or grass strained tightly from her bows into the sea, but the formation of these things was a mystery.

Lying awake then with a restless mind, watching all possible to see through the fore-hatch, which was little

more than a shadow of shrouds and an indistinct glow of pink on the fog, Pam began to be aware of some slight movements *outside*, not inside. An increased ripple in the water, presently the sense of a shift of the bows, as though the yawl had moved, or rather been moved from her consistent pull on the anchor line.

The girl began to calculate what the effect of tide turning might be. Undoubtedly *Blue Bird* would swing with the water. Her graceful bows would point directly towards the castle, and she would float farther out, with her stern towards the entrance of the big bay. If only one could see clearly, of course, all the fishing-boats would be pulling from their anchors in the same way. The tide would be running *out* now. Pam remembered how the bays and the rocks looked when that swirling tide went out with its irresistible power, and every feature of the wonderful view changed in an hour.

Though she was sure she knew just what was happening she felt uneasy, and the feeling took hold of her that she would like just to *see* what it looked like, and then, if anything odd appeared to be on foot, she could wake Fred, who was sleeping peacefully in her small cabin amidships.

Pamela could not see her sister's face, but her even breathing suggested deep sleep, and the bundle of blanket which was Penelope did not move.

She slid to the floor and put on her canvas shoes. She crawled up the little ladder of few steps, put her

head outside and listened. In the water alongside she was aware of faint splashings and ripplings. Then came the slightest pull on the moorings' line and drops of water pattered on the smooth sea in a wee shower like raindrops.

Pam crawled cautiously out of the hatch on to the deck and progressed very softly after the fashion of a tortoise up into the narrow bows where the bowsprit outflung its fine length, and the rigging of jib and forestay came down from the cross trees. She felt the taut wires and fingered her way among wet things like anchors, winches, and coiled sheets. Of course it was all as *neat* as man-of-war rules could make it, for these Guides were trained and bound by Navy smartness, every scrap of brass, every galvanized cleat had to be ship-shape Navy style! To Pam, however, it was mystery and wetness, her whole mind being set on finding out if a dog could possibly be alongside in the water, or if by chance some belated person might be prompted by curiosity to explore *Blue Bird* and her moorings.

" Smugglers!" thought Pam with a thrill; " could they be creeping around to look at us!" She felt elated, because you cannot get away from the feeling that smuggling is exciting when described in stories, and that was all Pam knew about it.

She flattened herself to the deck, feeling as she did so how damp it was, and crawled Indian fashion up to the bows, then very cautiously raised her head to see what was happening.

At first nothing was visible, but the night was not so dark as might have been supposed, because there was a moon behind the mist which caused a soft uncanny shine, a silvery glisten through the veil. Pam had the sense to keep her head within the shadow of the bowsprit spar, and so watching she waited to get her sight used to the misty gloom.

There was a minute or two of breathless tension on her part and then she saw the mooring cable twitch and a tiny shower of spark-like drops flew out, pattering on the grey water. She *heard* that. Nothing to see except the little jump of the rope! Then she made out something white, held above the water, something that seemed to touch that slanting cable, and slide along it down towards the water. She had hardly realized this before she made out a round smooth *black* object just above the water which moved with that white streak.

Perhaps two minutes, and the white object disappeared, but she still could distinguish the round black thing that seemed to be floating on the sea.

Even while she gazed, uneasily trying to pierce the shadows and decide what it was that she thought she saw, it became clear that the moorings' cable was jerking again very slightly. The movement could be felt in a shifting of *Blue Bird's* bows, a sort of quiver through her hull.

Watching as keenly as she was able, Pamela could not see that white streak any longer, but the round black object remained fairly stationary in the same place.

She was worried. Surely the Skipper ought to know that some odd business haunted the moorings. *Blue Bird* had been swinging head on towards the entrance of the bay, now it was all changed, she was head on towards the cliff and the castle, appearing to the girl so much farther out than she had seemed before. The fog even did not hide the fact that the position of the yawl had changed.

At that moment of tense watching Pam saw the round black thing melt into shadow, there was nothing then, no white streak, no round black object, the sea and mist were all grey gloom. It was funny!

Pamela supposed there was nothing to fuss about, so she began squirming back towards the fore hatch with a view to her bunk. At that instant she heard the light pat-pat of feet, a rattle, then a faint thud. She sat up and saw a shape standing in the dinghy which was pulled up alongside the yawl's counter. Picking herself up she went quickly along the deck with a hand stretched out to clutch rigging, jumped down into the cockpit, by which move she knocked over somebody who was running up from the companion.

" Oh snakes—you *idiot*!" gasped a voice, changing quickly to: " beg pardon, who are you? Thought it was Nell—Oh, I say, here's the very mischief——"

" What mischief?" demanded Pam, " Oh, Pat, you, is it? What on earth is the matter? Who is in the dinghy?"

" The Skipper—she's trying to catch——" there was a pause, then Pat went on hurriedly, speaking this time

to her sister who had appeared in the well—" Hullo, Les, we've got our work cut out with a vengeance, some poisonous person has cut the moorings, so——"

" Cut! Which? Who says so?" demanded Lesley with warmth of indignation, but a most sleepy expression.

" Oh, the Skipper knew there was something wrong by the way *Blue Bird* swung round. Someone cut the grass rope. She's gone after them, we are to drop the anchor, otherwise the yawl will be on the rocks! Come on, Les, for goodness' sake wake up! Come on, Pam—come and see the cable runs clear while I heave. We *may* stop the old girl bumping, but you know what the rocks are and the tide is racing out."

Pamela did know that, anyway. She realized the racing tide, and felt the swaying heave of the yawl as her hull moved.

" Gemini!" she gasped, " tell me what to do, Pat, I'll do any mortal thing, truly——"

Pat bounded along the deck with the sure tread of one used to it, lifted the anchor with a display of some force, threw it clear with a fluke downward in correct style, and called on Pamela for help in letting out cable till they should feel the tug of the anchor hold.

The two girls stood waiting. Pat anxious, for she knew this business was serious; as she explained to Pam:

" You can't fool about where rocks are simply peppered all over the place."

Presently *Blue Bird* ceased drifting along sideways

in that lazy fashion that was most disturbing. Ceased it, pulled up nose towards the cliff again. The anchor held, all was well. Pat gave a loud sigh of satisfaction.

" And now," she whispered to Pam, " we will just winch it up a bit—see, you just turn this handle and we wind ourselves a bit nearer to the anchor, which is holding nicely in a safe bed. When the tide is right out you will see that we are lying on the sand. At least I jolly well pray we *are*. I say, Pam, don't you see that some pig of a creature went and sawed the grass rope through, hoping we were all asleep and should presently find ourselves banging on the rocks at the point, left high and dry—awful!"

" I wonder," murmured Pam, as she helped the cable over the neat wheel with eager interest in learning all these new things.

" What do you wonder?"

" Well, I saw something—I mean *after* I heard something—which made me go out from the forehatch."

" Oh, you *did!* Tell me. There is Fred coming back, I hear the sculls, *she* has not found anybody; we should have heard if she had." Pat stood listening.

Then Pam told, in a low voice, because of the mysterious thrill lingering in the misty night, exactly what she had seen, felt, and heard. It was so *little* that when all was told it seemed to her ridiculous and not worth notice. Also, what could it have to do with the destruction of the grass rope?

For fully a minute Pat said nothing; the other girl

expected to be laughed at for thinking such silliness could have any bearing on the matter.

When Pat did speak, what she said seemed to have no bearing on the moorings whatever.

" I say, Pam, do you like that girl Etoile de What's-his-name?"

" Oh, I don't know! She's pretty."

" Hum, well, that's nothing to do with the matter. I guess she's clever, you know—I mean rather of the tricky kind?"

The tone was questioning; Pam felt an answer was required. She hesitated, as it was a family rule that no one was to pick holes in absent people. You were to give everyone fair play in any case.

" I rather thought," went on Pat, " that you were not extra keen on that girl yourself."

" I hardly know her," said Pam, finding her tongue, but hedging. " I think she's awfully pretty, and we all know she and her mother have a jolly hard time making ends meet. You cannot help sympathizing with people like them, living in such a castle and fearfully poor."

Now Pat belonged to a family that had all it wanted in the money line. The life of Etoile and her mother, appreciated and understood by the Carmichael girls, was hidden from *Blue Bird's* crew, except the Skipper, who had a wise head on her shoulders, besides a large heart.

" Oh, well," she said, " I'm just as sorry as you are for people who are badly tied up, but I can*not* see that

that is any reason for smuggling to gain a few pounds. Sheer silliness, *I* call it, and mean tricks are simply rotten. Hullo, here's the Skipper!"

Fred came running up forward, tested the anchor line, gave a satisfied grunt, and turned to the anxious girls with a smile.

" Well saved," she said.

" Did you see—anyone—anything?" asked Pat eagerly.

" Too foggy," answered the Skipper.

CHAPTER XIII

The Postern Key

Camilla was awake, and the reason for her wakefulness was not far to seek. And yet, on the face of it, nothing to worry even a person of anxious temperament.

She and her mother had, as we know, gone to the village of Grand Colin. They bought various groceries, took a great fancy to the bread set in racks around a big cool shop, gazed in rapt admiration at certain ancient houses, walls that were dreams of colour blending, and finally called at the chemist's for necessary matters. And there did Camilla meet once more face to face the little round man with amazing hair who had mistaken her for Etoile on the heath among the gorse bushes. He seemed to be a busy, intelligent person, and might have been owner or assistant.

The girl told herself in any case it was no business of hers, so she looked out of the window on to the cobbled street while a parcel was made up, and said nothing to her mother. Without knowing her own attitude of mind, she was bent on *defending* Etoile in

all things—it was as though she could not help rushing to her help, mentally as well as bodily! She could not give her away or judge her actions hardly, because a sort of protective sympathy forced her to battle alongside this lonely French girl.

A pinching anxiety dwelt in Cam's mind about Etoile, she wished to help her but saw no way to set about it. That was one reason for wakefulness. The second was that up in her room just before tea, as she leaned on the deep sill of the loophole gazing absorbed at the beauty below, she heard her door open and, glancing over her shoulder, was surprised to see the cook Michelle slip into the room with a noiseless movement, standing still at the door on the instant, with head bent to listen for sound of life in the rooms below.

Camilla, always a very simple and straightforward character, stared at the woman in surprise. Then she saw Michelle turn the key in the old lock, inside of course, and at that she spoke.

"Michelle, what do you want?"

At the sound of the voice Mrs. Lemoyne started so obviously that anyone could see she thought she was alone.

For answer she poured out a perfect storm of explanation in French, unlocking the door again behind her apron as she talked, and then unlatching it.

Camilla stood in the middle of the room, uncertain what to say, because she did not fully understand and was trying to piece together the words she did grasp.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle" several times, and a rush of chatter. Then, silently as she came, Michelle disappeared.

"She *thought* it was mother's room, and she wanted to ask—something—the kitchen fire or the coal! How funny—but why lock the door?"

Camilla stared at the door and the idea flashed through her mind that Michelle supposed her locking of the door was unobserved. Why did she do it?

And at that moment she had heard her mother's voice in the distance, and then Marcus racing up the stone steps. Outside the door he had called in the polite voice habitual to him:

"I say, Cam, the others aren't in their room and Mummy says I'd better go and see if they are on the *Blue Bird*, so can I have the key of the postern gate. You bagged it, didn't you?"

Camilla remembered vividly in these sleepless moments how the reminder of the key and her possession of it had instantly connected up in her thoughts with the odd visit of Michelle, or rather the odd conduct of Michelle when she did visit, because there was, naturally, no reason why she should not come up to ask a question. The connected thoughts had been Michelle and the key! Why should not the cook have come to get the *key*, "and, of course, she would have locked the door", Camilla reasoned. It came in a flash of interpretation as she stared at Marcus, who looked at her critically, wondering if Cam was in one of her funny moods.

Then they had opened the drawer to get the key and found no key.

" Pen and Pam must have taken it," was the decision, and Marcus sped away to tell his mother and see what had happened. Later on he came back with the news we know of already, that the two girls were on the *Blue Bird* and wanted to stay there, that the gate was open, and the key lost. " *They* had it all right," Marcus told his mother, " and sort of dropped it. Anyone can walk in, of course."

Mrs. Carmichael made light of that. She said she expected it would be found, but if no key turned up she could get one made to fit. She was very sorry for Pen and Pam, knowing how they would feel about taking the key and then losing it. Anyway she made quite light of it and told Marcus he could run down and say the girls might stop on the *Blue Bird* if the Guides were good enough to ask them.

All that happened inside the castle, and neither Camilla nor her mother worried at all about Pen and Pam on the yawl. It would be a new and exciting experience, a grand way of making new friends of the right kind. That was all right, but one thing stuck in Cam's mind and was keeping her awake when she ought to be sound asleep; this was, that Marcus said the girls declared they had locked the door, locked it, and pulled out the key in the scuffle afterwards. Yet he found it open, the door, that is to say. Here was a question with a big interrogation mark.

Mrs. Carmichael dismissed the point. She said:

"Oh, one often thinks one has locked a door when the lock didn't really turn, and *that* old key! Of course they were mistaken."

Marcus said nothing, he just let it go at that. Camilla said "Oh, but, Mummy——", checked herself and considered the matter with care.

Now, in the night, that was the one thing that kept her awake. She did not believe Marcus was mistaken, he was quite oddly shrewd and accurate in such matters. As for the girls—that key turned with a distinct spring that could be felt and took a strong effort to do it. Mummy did not know the key. There was surely something odd about it, and Cam tossed to and fro, puzzling in troubled efforts to see clear. All sorts of ideas kept on flashing little lights through her foggy mind. Michelle had come to steal the key! Or, had she stolen it earlier and come to put it back? No, there had not been time for that.

Camilla got up and looked out of the loophole—nothing to be seen but a white serpent of mist running up the course of the river. All the rest deep shadow and blobs of black on the night that were rocky lumps of gorse bushes.

Camilla felt the same queer excitement and restless questioning in her mind that was such a powerful influence since she had been in the castle. She couldn't rest. She felt she must *know*—something more! After a few minutes of hesitation and listening she slipped on some clothes—a dark blue frock and dark stockings—deciding as she did it that she would just go along

to the sea front and look at *Blue Bird*, satisfy her mind that the yawl was there—that would be easy as the gate was unlocked. She might even go down the steps, perhaps there would be a watch on board, she knew the Guides were very strict about keeping to all discipline—Royal Navy discipline. As Pat said, looking very correct:

"Please note, *we* are the *Téméraire!* There must be no falling off on a mere matter of *size*," and her eyes danced as she said it.

That being so, Camilla felt she might hail the watch perhaps, and probe this business of the lost key. It might be a confusion, a misunderstanding. Cam was in the mood one gets into at night sometimes, especially in a strange place, a place rather startling and apt to stir up imagination. She was impelled to *do* something, to inquire into things and put straight the tangles. When a person is in that mood it's impossible to wait till morning, because small matters seem so desperately important. The castle did not make Camilla afraid; it thrilled her soul, and strung up her powers. So, being dressed, she went off with her torch in her pocket and a perfectly contented sense of putting matters straight.

She planned to go along through the interior of the eastern wall from the foot of the stone stair, above the dining-room. It was shorter, and would lead directly to the tower at the south-east corner, the tower explored by Marcus and the girls that first evening. Of course it would be simpler far than going right round as *she*

had done when she first discovered *Blue Bird* and the other girls.

" I shall be back in a few minutes," decided Cam, " it's nothing just to run along that east passage! Broken and dusty, awfully tumbledown and smelly, but really no distance!" She decided that it was well worth the bother to be sure about that door; when a vexed question keeps on nagging at your mind it is not possible to sleep!

Camilla had a feeling that the spirit of this ancient fortress got into one's blood. At Hillside nothing waked you at night but noisy hooting cars racing along the white road, but this place seemed to be full of calls, of strange rushing thoughts. The everlasting voice of the sea entered by the loopholes, sighing and hushing; no one who *felt* could help realizing what winter storms might be, or how the battering clamour of great fights might have rent the night in the far-away days when fierce men tried to capture Le Camp Geffroy. Camilla found herself wondering what he was like—that prince who was called Gudfried, the Peace of God, son of King Regnar, and with her imagining came one of those rushes of sympathy for Etoile, chained by poverty in this glorious place, like a fairy-tale princess imprisoned by an ogre.

" Fancy having to do bits of smuggling in order to get your dinner and your shoes when you really need about half a million pounds to put the castle back to its perfect state. Oh, *poor* Etoile, and she feels; some would not mind, but I know—I know Etoile simply

aches," and Camilla stood still listening tensely to the little noises of the night in that tunnel of broken masonry. Rats—perhaps. Mice certainly. She refused to think about spiders! In fact why think about anything of the kind after leaving the last step of the stone stairs?

She flashed on her torch in order not to stumble over the fallen rubbish, and it was then that she first noticed the fact that someone—Etoile or the cook most likely—had swept a narrow path clear of stones and broken bits, straight on through the tunnel. She remembered again that it had been used by the defenders of the castle hundreds of years ago. She saw in her mind those rough men, dressed in leather with steel caps, tramping to and fro and shooting from the loopholes. She smelled the dust and heard the thuds and clatter!

As usual Cam was carried away by her pictures and dreams, to be wakened about half-way along by the soft blow of a door closing, a door in the distance ahead. She found herself realizing that there could be no door ahead to shut but the postern, for the east tower had no usable doors; there was a lot of ruin about that tower, broken doorways, low and narrow, but no doors —that sort of thing.

Camilla's mind seemed to flash over those places and she *knew* that somebody had come in by the postern —she turned her light out at once, stepped aside over the rubbish into the shelter of a massive beam, an upright that made a slanting support to the low roof—

the sort of giant beam that was repeated again all along, and formed a great part of the ancient structure.

Camilla realized the depth of the dark in the shadow of the beam and so, guarding carefully against a clatter of stones, she sprang aside and crouched against the beam. A yard or two down the tunnel a loophole let in the greyness of the misty night, just enough to show the path along the dusty floor with its scattered sprinkling of rubbish. Cam's thought was:

" I shall just be able to see who it is if anyone passes, but no one can see me."

The rest was dark.

Another thought in her mind was about the door being open—it must be if anyone could get in, though of course this presence might be Michelle again, or her husband! Very soon now she might be expecting him, no doubt that was why the woman had been key-hunting that afternoon.

Camilla seemed to see the whole business clearly. A sense of indignation filled her eager mind. Why could not Mrs. Lemoyne leave Etoile alone? The fault lay in the Lemoynes, they tempted this lonely girl to gain a pound or two by a method with which they enriched themselves a good deal more probably!

" Why can't they leave her alone?" thought Cam, irritated at her own conclusions; " how *can* she help joining in with them; after all she is only a girl, she doesn't realize how shady the whole business is."

After that she settled to try and induce her mother to get rid of Michelle; it would be the worst kind of

nuisance if officials got wind of it, and the Douane men came to get information.

" Perhaps the de Ruvignys would be fined heavily," thought Cam, " when the mother knows nothing and poor Etoile is dragged into it by——"

The train of argument was here broken by the noise of a stone tumbling with brisk clatter, then someone made an impatient sound. It was some way down the tunnel.

Silence, as though a person paused to listen, after that Camilla felt sure someone was coming along fast, but the step had an odd softness—quite odd, as though it were not a shoe!

" Could one hear a bare foot?" thought Cam, " of course not, but how uncomfortable on all this prickly rubbish! Anyway, Michelle would have hard feet, was she not a fisherman's wife, and daughter probably too?"

A tall slim shape passed across the grey patch opposite the loophole, a few seconds after it seemed to *swish* by her and check at the beam that was her guard.

Of course Cam thought she was seen, but in a moment she knew that this person had stopped to use the massive woodwork as a support while she raised one foot, it seemed to take a stone from her shoe!

She was close to Camilla, who held her breath, because she heard the light quick breaths from the other, who must have been running or engaged in some very energetic effort, by the way she drew her light gasps.

Camilla was conscious of something else; very distinct—first *cold*, then *wet*, because by a quick shift in position she herself found the other had flicked a tiny shower of water drops on to Cam's face and hand! It was like a small slap of chill. Not only that, audible in the stillness was certainly a faint patter of trickling water drops.

" P-r-r-r-r," the slim black shape shook with a long shudder so close to Camilla that again cold drops touched in dozens of tiny pats, stinging her face.

Something was done to the shoe, while the wearer of it leaned against the great joist quivering with little shivers.

Camilla thought, " She will catch her death of cold, *poor Etoile*," and having thought it shut out the conviction with a definite denial. She slammed the door as it were on her own knowledge. She said to her belief, " Ridiculous, it *can't* be Etoile—how absurd—" and all the time her heart went out in sympathy to this wet, shuddering girl who surely was Etoile. But she held herself back, and in a few moments the black shadow went away swiftly along the broken tunnel, walking with long sure strides in a tip-toe fashion that seemed to know the way without hesitation in spite of the deep gloom.

Camilla stood up and stretched cramped limbs, listened for fainter sound of human movement, and hearing nothing flashed her torch on to the floor and stared uneasily at the shining puddles of water, and farther off at the distinct prints of wet feet.

Of course she knew it was Etoile, but refused to admit the fact. And all the while her uneasy mind kept asking why on earth this queer girl was here, in such a state! Plainly she must have been in the sea out in her small dinghy, thought Camilla, and upset of course. " Jolly good luck the postern gate was open, she must have come up the steps just on the chance. *Poor* Etoile."

Again Cam was carried away by sympathy and pity. It really did seem a terrible thing that this lonely girl should go out on the sea at such hours, risking danger and death for the sake of helping her mother with a few pounds. That, you see, was the way Camilla regarded this odd situation. No doubt there are many ways of considering a point.

Off she went, feeling fairly safe about having the passage to herself now, and made off in the direction of the tower and the gate.

She planned to go out, down the steps, and speak to *Blue Bird* if possible; in her secret heart lay the idea of finding out if the Guides had seen any accident. It would be odd indeed if *they* had picked up Etoile and told her the postern gate was open. That notion pleased Camilla. " If we could *all* be jolly together," she thought, " how lovely!"

She came to the stair at the end, went down, passing the empty doorway of the lowest chamber in the tower, and came to the gate in the wall. Of course she raised the latch with complete confidence, but the door would not open.

It was *locked.*

She turned her torch light on to the lock. The door was locked undoubtedly—fast locked, but the key was gone.

Camilla gave a little stamp.

" How perfectly—Oh!" she muttered.

Couldn't get out! Nothing to be done. Obviously Etoile had—— But here she pulled up sharply. Under no circumstances would she blame the French girl.

A minute or two of thought and then she made her way back up the few steps and round the piles of débris into the wall tunnel along the *front*, the passage that led to the other tower where she had first seen the smugglers at work. There were one or two loop-holes along this face; she would try and find out what was happening to the girls on the yawl.

CHAPTER XIV

In which Marcus is not Asleep

Through a very narrow loophole in the wall Camilla looked out, and down to the moorings where *Blue Bird* always lay. She knew the spot, and felt a little shock as a few seconds of search convinced her that the yawl was gone—*gone!* Marcus said she lay in the usual place. He had spoken to the girls twice. All was well then.

Camilla defied what she called "silliness", and decided that the mist had confused her and caused her to mistake situations. There was the bay like a pond of ink with an uneven frame. A long point stabbing out from the right—a longer point beyond from the left—the broken up islands of detached rock, here and there blots. Over all a pale veil of sea-fog, always there, yet always shifting—one wondered if it could be in one's eyes. Over all a canopy of awesome black clouds, huge, brooding, drifting with a slow movement, sending out fingers, trailing streamers across the blackness, and because of the scrap of moon hidden somewhere, showing giant shapes that filled the mind

with a sort of fright because of the mystery and look of power—the awful size!

Camilla stared up and round, and heard her own heart beating fast in the silence, then she resolutely refused to consider that sight any more, and tried to search the bay for *Blue Bird* in a practical manner. It was difficult though with the veil lying over everything, never still yet always there.

She stretched her head out to see all she could of La Tasse cove round to the right. Perhaps the yawl was there! The confusion lightened a little as the clouds shifted, and in a moment Camilla understood that the cove was all sand, or sandy enough for boats to be aground. She saw black shapes motionless, fishing-boats. She tried to remember whether she had seen the yawl aground, and could not. Surely the water was deeper in front of the castle, just in front where the rock plateau ran right out.

" If the gate were unlocked one could make certain," thought Cam, worried by all this confusion, and as the thought arose she heard a noise at the postern. Heard distinctly some person trying the lock with little vigorous shoves and shakes. Camilla hesitated, could it be the wet person going back—or Michelle? Surely not, for the pushings did not seem to come up to the strength of Michelle's arm.

" In for a penny in for a pound," thought Cam recklessly, " after all what does it matter?" and she sped back along the passage till she reached the stone steps, then she listened.

" Oh, blow the rotten gate," muttered a low voice sharp with indignation.

Camilla drew in her breath, suppressed a little giggle and whispered.

" *Marcus!*"

Dead silence ensued—you could hear someone listening.

" I say, Marcus," urged Cam again persuasively, she knew exactly what Marcus was feeling.

" Who are you?" inquired a low voice, in a slightly strained tone.

" Only Cam. Come up the steps and along the tunnel to the right. I can't make out what has happened to the yawl."

Boldly she flashed her torch down the few steps to the gate, getting a vision of her brother, a jacket over his sleeping-suit, blinking at the light, a puzzled frown on his small keen face.

He came up the steps and together they retreated along the tunnel to the first loophole. Then he spoke in the slightly dominant tone of the conventional male being who questions the conduct of his belongings—girl belongings!

" I say, Cam, what on earth——"

" I know," agreed Camilla, " but, Marc, haven't you noticed that this castle literally bites into one's brain like the spiders that make people dance. Never would a person get out of bed at Hillside and amble about the road. One would not think of it. But here one has a flash of something weird and one goes bounding over

ruins and ramparts up and down creepy places without a blink of hesitation. Fact is, I came along to look at *Blue Bird*, because I had a funny feeling and couldn't sleep."

"I told you about the yawl and the whole lot of them," said the boy, in a protesting voice.

"Oh, I know," Cam started to justify herself hastily, "but you see, Marc, there is something in it, because the gate is shut! I couldn't open it, and I heard you trying it just now."

"Didn't you say you wanted to look at the yawl?" Marcus changed the subject in a tolerant manner, as it was not possible to contradict the fact that Cam's uneasiness had ended in unexpected complications. The gate *was* locked, he had said it was open, had found it so. Camilla did not press that, she leaned from the nearest loophole.

"Can you see her?" she asked, in a low voice, "you've got wonderful sight, Marc. *I* can't find her in this fog."

There followed a pause of minutes, because the boy would not admit that he could not pick *Blue Bird* out of the strange floating shadows that filled the bay. Camilla looked at him uneasily, she was just going to speak when Marcus said:

"No wonder we couldn't find her. She's not on her moorings, she's simply miles out! Look, Cam, can't you see the point where the rocks end? I mean the causeway from the foot of the steps, it streaks out like a regular horn towards the outside horn of La

Tasse cove. Well, if you can follow the dark line—it's really quite plain, because the tableland of rocks goes right round to the river—one mass of rocks and brown seaweed—much darker than the sand naturally. If you sort of trail your eye along the edge of the rocks to the point where they end, you see a black patch shaped like a fish—but just as motionless as a rock—well, that's *Blue Bird*."

"Oh, snakes!" muttered Camilla, with a troubled gasp, "but, Marc, why on earth——"

There came a pause while Cam followed her brother's directions; then having discovered the fish-shaped rock beneath the drifting mist she gave a little exclamation of dismay.

"But, Marc—but I say, she's——"

"She's jolly well aground," said Marcus, "and just off the rocks—simply an inch this side. Narrowest shave on earth. Of course she can't hurt like that lying on the sand, but it would have been an appalling job if she'd grounded on the edge of the rocks and tumbled over. She might quite easily have done that, you know, Cam!"

Marcus conjured up horrors with satisfaction. Camilla sought for a practical explanation.

"It can't be comfortable with the bunks all sideways," she said, "probably they dragged their anchor and——"

"It wasn't their anchor, it was moorings, jolly well sound and solid," retorted Marcus in a grim manner, and then after a short pause for consideration, "I say,

Cam, you bet there has been some tricky business over the yawl. It's all very well to take things for granted, but you know, and I know, that Miss What's-her-name—the Skipper, I mean—wouldn't go banging off wholesale on to that rock plateau. She might get through by the passage into the river; they did—with the dinghy when you were on board—but she jolly well could not do it haphazard and make a rotten mess of it like that! After all, those Guides are fearfully wide-awake about sea things, they are almost as sharp as trained sailors."

All this Camilla knew just as well as her brother. Her mind flashed over the situation, picking up points. It was obvious to her reason that something untoward had happened to the yawl, but at whose hands! *Who* had been the enemy, the mischief maker?

A little cold shiver passed down Camilla's spine as she thought of that dripping figure in the tunnel. Even the sound of trickling water and shudders of cold came back to memory.

There might have been a telepathic flash between herself and the boy at her side, for Marcus broke the silence.

"I say, Cam, you know what brought *me* out I suppose?"

"No, you haven't said. I thought you sort of felt lively. What was it then?"

"I heard a row. I mean I was waked up by a sort of fussing of people in the cook's room down by the

kitchen. I can hear through my loophole. Michelle began making the usual squeaks, *you* know how she goes, fearfully surprised and all that. Somebody had come into her room. There was an awful fussing going on. I could make out a new voice talking fast—they got louder and louder. I got up and strung myself out of my loophole. Michelle is absolutely a rotter, Cam, she's a liar, she's——"

"Oh well, she *thinks* she's serving the people she really loves, Marc."

"Sounds fairly well, my dear girl, but she ought to be reasonably honest to the people who pay her, whereas she simply stinks of dishonesty all round—and so does that girl—what's her name, the one *you* like so much."

"Etoile de Ruvigny? Oh, Marcus—poor thing! One must remember there are two points of view in——" Camilla spoke with hurried uneasiness.

"Not so sure when it comes to going on like this, Cam. I bar points of view that make a person play low tricks, and she jolly well does that, you know. At least that's how I look at it, it's my point of view, I mean, and I can't see another one—so far."

Marcus glanced up sideways at his sister's face, dim in the shadow. He had immense respect for Cam, for her character and her brains. She came next to his mother, though Pam was perhaps a closer friend. Cam, being the soul of honour, felt it only fair to concede something to Marc's instinct.

"I'm awfully *sorry*," she allowed, admitting to

herself that the conduct of Etoile certainly was open to question.

"Sorry? About what? Do you mean me?" asked Marcus.

"No, Etoile. Honestly, Marc, I wish she—well, you know."

"I wish she'd be square to Mum," said the boy firmly. "And anyway she'll get sold if she keeps on—making an idiot of herself with her rotten smuggling. A girl like that ought not to play the fool. What I'm wondering about is, did she do something to *Blue Bird*?"

"How could she?" When she had asked the question Camilla felt suddenly seized with a conviction that Etoile *had* done something to *Blue Bird*. It was not easy to forget the drip of the water, the pond on the floor, the little shudders of that dark wet shape while it bent over the shoe.

"We could ask the Guides what she did. They will know all right," said Marcus. "I say, Cam, can't we go down now, and see what's up?"

"The gate is locked, we can't get out," answered his sister, but her voice was uncertain.

"We're not chained to that one gate; Cam, why not go out by the main gate, and round to La Tasse, and get over the sands to the yawl? Anyway we should *know* then, shouldn't we?"

"But, Marc, we haven't been that way down yet. At least, I haven't."

"Oh, Pam and I had a good look from the western

ramparts. It's as easy as anything. Just a slanting kind of cliff, sand at the bottom. It's no earthly use standing here staring at mist—come on, Cam. Mummy won't mind when there's two of us; it's perfectly all right."

As Marcus moved Camilla gave in. After all, the other girls and the Guides were all on *Blue Bird*, and that short run over the sand would " put her wise " to the yawl's trouble. She knew that her mother would not worry if Marcus was with her, she had often said that.

" All right," she agreed, " it won't take long."

Cam was an optimistic person always. Marcus thought so when she said that, and in his heart settled that any investigation might take longer than his sister expected.

" It's a frightfully funny place, this castle. We're always doing mad kind of things." Suddenly he remembered a sentence in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, and gave a little chuckle.

" What are you laughing at?" asked Cam in an undertone as they started.

" Oh, it came into my head, ' I'm mad, you are mad, we are all mad '—you know, out of *Alice*. We *are*, you know, Cam. This whole business is simply insane."

Camilla considered the question. Then she said:

" I don't see that everything unusual that happens should be ' insane ', Marc. One allows it is surprising and that it couldn't happen at Hillside or Lower Framfield! Absolutely could *not*, but it fits Le Camp Geffroy

to a T. When one thinks of all the startling things that must have happened here in ten hundred years one feels rather pale. Besides, it's rather an insult to the Prince to be utterly commonplace in his stronghold. I *try* to be, but I can't. Even one's bones feel different, at least mine do! I shouldn't think twice about climbing out of a loophole on a rope ladder *here*, but, Marc, can you imagine getting out of the window at Hillside?"

"You can't imagine anything but the postman, the baker's cart, and chickens scratching up your only plant just when you expect it to grow," said her brother, "*I* think Hillside is simply the limit; all the same, Cam, if one doesn't keep tight hold on one's—well, on one's *sense*, one could really do pretty queer things here. Gudfried—or Geffroy, whatever you call him—jolly well haunts his old fief, *I* think—hullo, what's that? Who goes there?"

"Sh-s-s-sh!" warned Cam, giggling against her will. "For goodness' sake don't let's war with Michelle, it would bother Mum so. Stand in the shadow a minute."

Marcus allowed himself to be drawn into the patch of black, hard by a massive timber upright. They stood waiting.

"What did you hear?" whispered Cam.

"Nothing much, only a bit of plaster or stone tumbling. I had a feeling someone was coming."

Into a patch of paler dark opposite a loophole came a small black shape. Tail stiff as a mast, muscles taut, aware of the nearness of her friend Camilla, equally

aware of mice and movements in the débris, came Mrs. MacStinger. Of course being a cat she did not come directly to the timber joist. Suddenly she checked, held up a paw with disdain, flicked it sharply, and sat down to lick it.

Marcus slipped out of the shadow and went to her. Mrs. Mac glanced at him, made a thin rippling sound, and returned to her licking efforts, just as though it were the most important matter in life; she knew, as all cats know, that human beings would wait till she was ready, which is, of course, what does happen usually; people whistle for a dog and walk away, but they go after a cat and coax it; cats take advantage of this naturally.

So Mrs. MacStinger sat in the centre of the passage and cleaned one paw, her ears laid flat, and knew all about Camilla in the shadow.

"What blithering wasters cats are," muttered Marcus, and he picked up Mrs. Mac and carried her back to his sister.

"I *say*, Cam," he went on, "she's quite *wet*, her feet are simply muddy—here, don't claw, you idiot! Just feel her tail."

Camilla felt, because she was asked, but she knew beforehand that the cat had run down the passage in the track made by Etoile. She was as wet as though she'd been in the sea.

"This is fairly rum," went on the boy, sniffing cautiously at his hands, "*sea* water, absolutely reeking with sea water!" He put the cat down and took Camilla's

torch before she realized what he was doing, then he went slowly along towards the inhabited tower with the light turned full on the water trail.

" Rather surprising I didn't wake up to this before, Cam," he said, rejoining his sister. " You see I came along through it, but having shoes on one didn't rise to it. Sea water! Well, *somebody* came up from the sea by the steps, through the postern gate, and along the whole way to the house—I mean *our* tower. You bet that same person went to Michelle and made all the racket of jabber that I heard. Well, what about it?"

" Oh!" murmured Cam, then feeling this was a weak remark, she added vaguely, " oh well, it's awfully queer!"

" I wouldn't mind betting it's the girl. As far as one knows it's just the kind of thing she would do. Jolly obvious, I think. Now suppose she happened to be barging about in her boat as usual, up to all kinds of games, *she* laid hands on that key somehow, she knows the rocks pretty well by this time--what is strange to us is jolly plain to her. I guess she laid hands on that key and locked herself inside; what's more, Cam, supposing she happened to be anywhere out there while *Blue Bird* and I were bellowing at one another in the fog, naturally she knew the gate was open, and heard them say the key had dropped on the rocks. It's simply staring plain, *I* think——" as he paused at this point Camilla agreed in a whisper that it appeared to be rather " staring plain ".

" *She* was in the water, you bet, so she made this wet trail coming along."

Camilla suggested assent by a murmur. Marcus was what one calls in a game of hide and seek—warm. His next remark was still warmer.

" I wonder whether that girl was responsible for getting the yawl in a mess."

" Oh *no*, Marc, she wouldn't!" Camilla protested eagerly; " besides, how *could* she?"

" My dear girl, what do we know about her tricks and her manners? My private opinion is that she would jolly well stick at nothing when she aims to clear the way for her little business. Mind you," added the boy in a broadminded tone, " I'm not prejudiced, truly I'm not. But I do think that things—I mean events—rather point to the idea that she sticks at nothing."

" I hope not," murmured Cam nervously, " I mean, I hope she's not like that, she looks such a dear."

" Oh, I guess she's all right," allowed Marcus generously, " you never know what a person might be forced into doing. All the same, Cam, you must admit that wrecking a jolly decent craft like the yawl would be rather an outsider's game."

Camilla admitted nothing, because by this time they had come to the angle where the rampart tunnels met and steps descended to the ground floor chambers. Here also the spiral stone stair went up into the tower of inhabited bedrooms.

Camilla looked at the upright little figure of her brother. She warmed anew to the gallant personality that was Marcus Carmichael and felt proud of him, but, of course, she did not say so.

" I *think*," she whispered, laying a finger on her lips and making a slight sign towards the tower as suggesting sleepers, " I think we had better just wait in the dining-room for a minute or two to be sure there are no strange people about before we go out, don't you, Marcus? We can hear, also we could see from the window above the kitchen entrance. They may be gone, probably the coast is all clear."

" Right you are," agreed the boy, and with careful steps they went down the short wooden stair that led to the ground floor and from thence into the big low room with the brick floor. On the way Camilla peeped into the sitting-room with the groined roof on the right-hand side—it was empty and ghostly in its white stateliness of design.

Mrs. MacStinger being set down made for the open door that led to the rooms of Marcus and Bethia, cell-like chambers in the wall just above Michelle's department. The cat trotted off, making little bleats of inviting sound. Cam and the boy sat down in the deep window-seat to watch. Within a few minutes two shadowy shapes came up the steps from the kitchen door. Both shapes were obviously women, bunchy with full skirts, the outline of the village folk who came with fish or vegetables to sell.

Sister and brother watched these figures from the

window. Marcus began to whisper; Cam hushed him, muttering:

" A friend of Michelle's."

The boy glanced at her intent face with a quaint look of protective toleration. He knew who the friend was, but realized that Cam was in her shell, a way she had at times!

At that moment a slight noise behind them drew attention to Bethia standing respectfully in the doorway that led to the little bedrooms. Her hair was strained back from a well-soaped face, neat, round, with red cheeks, and her straight shape was attired in a print dressing-gown dotted with tiny flowers.

" I beg pardon, Miss Cam," said Bethia, " it don't seem not hardly right bein' out of bed this time. But Cook's been keeping up such a palaver down below that a person couldn't rest. It don't seem hardly the thing, but we must remember furriners ain't brought up British, so likely enough it's right for *them*. Mother says we should beware of hard judging. I went to see if Master Marcus was asleep, and not finding him I was a bit upset. So long as you're here—well——"

Camilla explained in a whisper. Marcus had heard noises and come out to investigate. She had found him, they were watching Michelle let her friend out of the big gate. To Cam it sounded an unconvincing story, but Bethia was quite satisfied. She flitted away, a tidy little speckled shadow.

Then Cam said:

" Go to bed, old man, we *can't* go out to *Blue Bird*,

it's too big a job climbing all down to Tasse *now*—we mustn't. Michelle is still under the arch with—her friend. Bethia is awake. Honestly we'd better chuck it for to-night. We'll make Michelle give up the key to-morrow."

"If she's got it," said Marcus drily, and departed obediently.

CHAPTER XV

Guides on the Watch

In the morning Camilla told her mother the odd story of these happenings; not only that, Mrs. Carmichael sent for Michelle, told her the postern gate was locked and the key gone.

" If," said the lady of the castle, " that key is not back to-day, Michelle, I regret that we shall have to find a new cook. Bethia shall cook and we will engage a *femme de chambre* from the village."

Michelle shrugged her shoulders and talked volubly; she did not understand Madame, what had she to do with keys; Mademoiselle Camille had the key, the *jeunes demoiselles* had lost it, *n'est ce pas?* Had she not served Madame well? &c., &c., but Mrs. Carmichael very quiet, just lifted her penetrating gaze from the sewing on which she was very busy, looked straight into the restless black eyes of her clever cook, and repeated the request.

" You will find the key, if you please, Michelle, you will put it in the lock. If that key is not found within three days you will return to your home in

Le Grand Colin and I will have a new key made for the gate, which I will keep myself. That is all. That is my decision."

Michelle talked fast, Madame sewed with steady eyes fixed on her sewing. Michelle flounced off through the doorway, looking very square and well-covered. Mrs. Carmichael smiled to herself. She did not wish to quarrel with anybody, but it really was rather outrageous behaviour.

Presently arose the question of Pen and Pam on *Blue Bird*, isolated, and Marcus got very busy hailing the yawl from the loophole in the southern walls to explain that the postern gate was locked. The tide was high again then, and presently the dinghy, putting off from the yacht, floated at the base of the rocks while explanations were exchanged.

" You'll have to come up by La Tasse or the river channel," said Marcus, leaning out over the water; " sorry, but the gate's locked."

The girls looked at one another.

" *Somebody* about last night," called Pam, with a note of mystery in her voice.

" Jolly obvious," came from Marcus.

Then Pat said:

" I say, the Skipper is going round to anchor in the river. Will Mrs. Carmichael let us keep your sisters? Do you mind asking? We rather plan to go round with the tide and find a decent anchorage by daylight—or moorings."

Marcus agreed politely, he desired urgently to know

why the *Blue Bird* had drifted into the odd position she occupied, but felt sure her crew had no desire to proclaim the secret of their misfortunes. Being tactful, he merely suggested that Pen and Pam had better land and ask leave for themselves.

" Mum would sooner see them," he said.

The sense of this was plain, and both girls were presently in the white stone room, telling the story of the night adventures to their mother, Claudia, and Cam; in return they heard that the gate had been found locked, but that Michelle was under orders to produce the key—or—*go*.

Pen and Pam looked at one another, and a wireless message passed between them to keep silence as to what they *believed* was the secret.

Pen's eyes said: " We don't *know*, you see."

Pam submitted, because of devotion to Camilla.

" Cam would simply loathe it if we showed up Etoile," was the feeling; " Cam has dreamed that female into a heroine now. She *always* builds up heroines and heroes, nine times out of ten they are not worth twopence farthing, and as for Etoile, she's a pig of the first water. I hate people who don't play the game."

That was what Pam thought, and said straightly to Pen afterwards. Pen's answer was agreement, but not quite such severe stricture.

" No use getting mad," said Pen, in her cool voice. " I back the Skipper to put Etoile in her place presently. Didn't you notice, Pam, that at breakfast her

eyes were looking inwards all the while? People like the Skipper and Mummy do look inwards when they're getting matters sort of *tidy* and settling how to dish the machinations of enemies! I'm perfectly sure the Skipper will find a way to flatten out Etoile, and Mummy will chain up Michelle. You wait."

" It will be a top-hole jaunt getting anchored in the river," Pam murmured, " we shall see what that girl is doing."

So Pen and Pam returned to the yawl via La Tasse cove, where the dinghy floated waiting, and told the Anson pair what they knew of happenings in the castle.

" The Skipper is going out," Pat told them; " we went down to *Blue Bird* just now, and she plans to go out and look round, then we come back and anchor in the river. Skipper's got a notion something is up, there is wind about, look at the bits of cloud, torn rags of clouds from the sea."

So the four girls went back to the yawl and learned many things aboard the lovely craft while everything was put ship-shape for an exploring run outside. Every one of the party was in high spirits except the Skipper, whose keen brown face wore a preoccupied look; not only that, Fred's mouth was set in a fashion she kept for moments of strong feeling. Probably her cousin Nell Blake was the one member of the crew who understood that Frederica Jervis, owner and skipper of the yawl *Blue Bird*, was desperately angry at the trick played on her, and the insult offered to

her yacht! Such a thing as *Blue Bird* drifting broadside on to rocks in a calm, only saved from wreck by the throwing out of the emergency anchor, was unheard of, also unforgiveable. The Skipper was very quiet, she ate no breakfast, and presently looked over every yard of her yacht with tender solicitude to see if she could find any harm done by the night's adventure. The tide, high soon after breakfast, was a glorious sheet of water ruffled by eager little puffs of wind that sent ripples over the rocks with soft hissing noises, leaving frills of white caps against the shining black and brown of the half-hidden dangers.

Fred decreed that *Blue Bird* was to go outside, so up went her white sails, and the castle girls gurgled with joy as they heard and felt the heavy folds slip and billow out, straining up and up under the pulling life of the winch. Every move was exciting, every act a drama. When Lesley and Pat sang a quaint monotonous little chant as they turned the winch Pen and Pam felt that at last they knew something about sea life.

Blue Bird lifted and shifted under the pressure of tide, then she leaned over sideways as a sudden breeze took her. At that joyous moment Pam, looking up at the battlements on the rocks saw a Union Jack making Morse signals from a loophole. She answered vigorously with upraised arm and a handkerchief, warning the crew at the same time that Marcus wanted to speak the yawl.

The dinghy was put out, and with Pat rowing they sped over the smooth water to the steps, now covered

with wash and floating seaweed for many feet up.

" I say," called Marcus, leaning out in a perilous manner, " she's here."

" Who? Which?" demanded Pam, guessing pretty correctly the person indicated.

" Oh, you know. I can't yell out names and as the key has not yet returned from its Bank Holiday I can't come down. So please open your ears, my good girl. *She* wants us to come to the what's-its-name—sacred stone, or haunted stone to-night. The whole bally gang. There's a moon and she says the fairies will all be there. Cam is in a haze of happiness. Mum says all right and would I let you all know. I say, Pam, can you ask if the Skipper would let me stop on board to-night? Truly I don't care an artificial centime about a bunk, I'd much rather have a rug and roll up on deck. May I come on board when you get back? Do you think she would mind?"

Pat broke in at this point and with hands round her lips called up to the anxious speaker that the Skipper was expecting him.

" She jolly well *counts* on having you, Marcus," called Pat, who was a young person of vision and understood these matters.

" You can do as you like about sleeping. What about Camilla, your sister?"

" Oh, she's going across with the other girl, you know who I mean. I rather think she plans to watch for witches and their friends all night. Anyway she said nothing about *Blue Bird*. Perhaps it will settle

itself later. Anyway thanks most frightfully. I'll come on board in the river after supper."

The dinghy went back to the yawl and Fred smiled at the messages.

" To-night, ah," she said, her keen eyes gazing thoughtfully out towards the rock-dotted open sea.

" Why ' Ah '?" asked Lesley, observing her.

" Wait and see," retorted the Skipper, nor did she say a word more when asked, but her crew had the impression that she was facing some exciting propositions and had made up her mind over some effort.

With the tide high, and little gusty breezes blowing from the sea, *Blue Bird* ran out on short " tacks ". As all the sea-world knows, no sailing vessel can go straight into the wind's eye—therefore she turns a little sideways to right or to left—that is starboard or port — catches the wind on the side of her sails and spins along under the pressure, kept straight by her helm. This requires good steering if a vessel is coming out from river or harbour, especially if the coast is rockbound.

As *Blue Bird* fled away, bending to the little gusts, her lovely lines cutting the rippled sea like a bird in the air, Fred never spoke. The clever tacks she made kept the crew busy, as sails had to be shifted at each turn, and the two Carmichael sisters, sitting in the cockpit near the Skipper, saw much but said little.

Pam had the same sight as Marcus. Absorbed in the scene, nothing escaped her eyes. Presently therefore her attention was drawn to a broad-built fishing boat

of ketch rig coming towards the harbour at a steady pace, white water bubbling up from her rather blunt bows. She considered it with interest for a few minutes, saw the vessel run into a band of sunlight which lighted up her shabby rigging, showing every detail, saw her swerve aside, leaning over from a heavy puff of that gusty sea-breeze as a shadow of cloud swept along the water, and then the ketch disappeared from view. She had dived behind the long horn of wooded rocks that ran out to sea from the coast on the left-hand side of the entrance. She was coming towards them before the wind one minute, almost directly the changeful sea was empty but for far away white specks which were sails of fishing boats in the distance.

"*Just* so," muttered the Skipper under her breath.

Pam's quick ears caught the whisper, she looked round quickly, her eyes asking a question. Fred smiled.

"*This* puts a new complexion on things," she said, "but it is just what I expected. Don't you think it is always satisfactory to find that the expected is happening? One comes to the conclusion that there is a very clever fellow in the world anyway."

She tapped herself on the chest with her finger and returned Pam's gaze with a shrewd and whimsical twinkle.

"You expected that ship to go the other way?" suggested Pen; "what does it matter?"

"There is no other way, my dear child," said Fred, "that ship is an old friend and belongs to Le Petit Colin village and the long creek of Sainte Magloire

River. Her name *L'Hirondelle*—which is to say *The Swallow*. She makes trade in contraband for the East coast of Britain and her owners are Joseph Lemoyne and Jean Bonamy. She's a good staunch boat, she can stand dirty weather, and she goes to and fro busy as a bee. I guess she has got rid of the cargo that your sister saw in the south-west tower of your castle, and is now coming back with a certain amount of cash in hand to load up again!

" Now we see the full force of Mrs. Lemoyne's anxiety to get the key—I say Mrs. Lemoyne, because that is obvious, anybody else shall be given the benefit of the doubt till we are certain;" the Skipper gave her head a little sideway jerk, " and now," she said, " my plan includes a picnic in the wood on that point, we anchor on this side—wind is off shore all right, we go ashore, have lunch and then—well, we'll see."

Pen and Pam gazed at her, trying to grasp the intention. They had come out for a day on the sea, they expected to sail out and out among the islands! Now they were told that a picnic was the plan. Why? What had that to do with the fishing ketch? However, the Skipper's word was law, moreover, she *must* know; they assumed that and swallowed small pangs of disappointment, noticing at the same time that neither of the Guides said a word about the fishing vessel.

Blue Bird ran across the wide entrance of the estuary, cast anchor in the channel of the river under the shelter of the long horn of rocky woodland that concealed the ketch. The racing tide was clearing out the whole big

bay, but *Blue Bird* lay facing upstream, her graceful stern pressed this way and that by the gusts of wind. All the girls packed into the dinghy, landed in imminent danger of swamping, pulled up the boat and climbed the steep sandbank, then the bush-sheltered rocks, and disappeared into the woods. It was noticeable, had there been anyone to notice, that the Skipper watched the river all the time with quick backward glances—but there was no sign whatever of sail or craft, the fishing boats having gone out early with the tide and no doubt intending to come back with the flow.

Very cautiously the Guides reconnoitred the land, with practised movements they passed through the spruce fir copses and the tangled masses of fern and briar at the summit. Pat and Lesley went first, Pen and Pam followed, doing as the others did. The Skipper slipped along through the undergrowth rather farther afield, and Nell, quite in the rear, picked her way, watching silently. She was not such a highly trained Guide, but she had a natural gift for scouting, her light cat-like movements and power of concealment being extremely useful in emergency.

Suddenly Pen and Pam heard a quaint little chirruping bird's call, and the heads of the two Guides disappeared. Again came the call as though in answer to the first. They checked instinctively, feeling that here was something not quite on the surface, then the Skipper dived past them, going in the direction where her Guides' heads had been swallowed up in the undergrowth.

Pen and Pam glanced at one another and followed, taking care not to move the bushes or make any noise.

In two or three minutes they came on their party, Lesley and Pat sitting on the ground, attentive, Fred kneeling to look out between two bush-sheltered boulders. Silence prevailed.

Pat nodded at the sisters, then she whispered:

" Clear as sand, people. It's *L'Hirondelle* down below us, Lemoyne's boat. She'll come in at high tide. The Skipper thinks——"

Fred turned her head, made a sign for silence, then she shifted her position to a better point of vantage, observing closely the business-like arrangements of the ketch in the shelter below.

About fifteen minutes went by in which nothing in particular seemed to happen. Then that little chirrup was heard again invitingly from the rear and the Skipper, leaving her guard, slid back into the brushwood.

" Nell," whispered Pat, across the space between herself and Pam, " now you listen."

The Carmichael girls obeyed, feeling rather thrilly, and were rewarded very shortly by the sound of three inviting little chirrups. Pat and Lesley came into action at once, retreating silently in the direction from which the chirrup had come, so the other two followed.

Within an apparently dense clump of brushwood they found the Skipper unpacking the lunch.

" Nell's watching the rear," she said.

" What for?" thought Pam, but she would not ask, as it seemed so stupid not to understand.

Quiet as field mice the Guides laid out the food and just as all was set Nell slipped in through the bushes and sat down.

" Not a sign of her," she told Fred. " Guess she'll try the land trail," said Nell, " the river is a jolly sight too conspicuous from now on. I mean if she's to come *and* go."

" One to come, one to go," whispered Pat, quoting *Looking-Glass* way of expression, " perhaps she won't come at all! And what about meeting us all to-night? She's *got* to act showman. It's her funeral."

The Skipper gave a little snort of contempt.

" She means it to be *Blue Bird's* funeral, or I'm a stuffed owl," she said, " I see how it is. She has seen us land and she can't face the music. She'll wait till we depart—obviously I mean—and then she will carry out her job," at this point the Skipper became thoughtful.

It was not a noisy picnic. No one laughed. They ate, they enjoyed the food, but they talked in whispers; one and all seemed to be intent on something else, as no doubt they were. The Skipper was rather grave, she was anxious in fact, because the weather was showing little wicked signals of disturbance. Torn bits of clouds were coming up from the far horizon as though they had been ripped from a bigger garment and blown across a sky which was no longer very clear. Fred's black eyebrows were drawn together more than usual, and more than once she slipped off to look at the ketch.

About half an hour passed before she gave her decision. Then it came as a distinct surprise, to the Carmichael sisters at any rate.

The whole party were to go off, as soon as the tide began to rise. They were to board *Blue Bird* with the picnic properties and try to appear like any other picnic. They were to pack into the dinghy as before, but this time they were to go in two parties, while the smallest was to lie in the bottom of the boat coming back from the yawl, and row in the second crew.

" She can shelter under the picnic kit," said the Skipper thoughtfully, " my point is that I want any possible lookers-on to count one person twice over, see?"

There followed a breathless silence while the party realized her meaning. Pam as usual was very quick.

" Then," she said, " we are not all going, is that it, Skipper?"

" Yes," allowed Fred, " that's just it."

CHAPTER XVI

When Three and Two make Six

Both land and water trails up the river remained deserted as far as vision could discern, while the girls, six in number as we know already, boarded the *Blue Bird* in two parties—the plan and the fulfilment of it were as follows.

The Skipper rowed, conveying Nell and Pam to the yawl, they boarded her on the side farthest from the shore they had left. Three girls stood waiting among the rocks, namely Lesley, Pat, and Pen. Three figures all in blue and much of a size, except that Pen was smaller and slimmer than the others. After a short delay the Skipper returned alone, apparently, but dexterously concealing the slim shape of Pam disposed along the footboards under the thwarts, hidden by a second pair of sculls, the tiny mast and tumbled lug-sail which formed a useful rig for the little craft at certain times and for special purposes.

Fred ran her boat in farther along the point, where big boulders were high and dry during the ebb. Three girls raced along to pull her up and surround her with scurry and busy manœuvres for boarding and pushing

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CLOSE BY—A MAN'S VOICE

off. The upshot was that one, *Pam*, as excited and proud as though she had been Sherlock Holmes entrusted with an international plot, was left behind among the tumble of big rocks and the Skipper went off a second time with her load of three passengers.

Let anyone think, and it will be plain to them how a *possible* suspicious observer would be satisfied as to numbers. Knowing that six girls were on board in the first place, that watcher—if one should be in hiding—must have seen six girls *return* in the two boat-loads. She would, of course, see the Skipper go and come back, taking two the first time, and three the second journey, but she would not know that Pam had been conveyed back to the point and left in hiding among the boulders.

Pam was triumphantly pleased to be chosen, and stored her instructions in her clever head with infinite care. The task laid on her shoulders by the Skipper was simply that of a Scout; she was to find out all she could and join the others that night at Les Tuzets—or Déhusets—unless she found a chance before the tide covered the sand.

" Find out her game, Pam, in black and white," said Fred. " I'm pretty sure what is up, but of course that's guess work. We might as well know the facts."

So they set out to *get* the facts as described, and on Pam fell the choice, because the Skipper considered her slim smallness and wonderful sight strong points. Fred did not say all she thought of the girl's shrewd observation and keenness of intelligence! There is no

doubt that Pat ran her close for the commission, but the Skipper knew from experience that Pat was rather a wild bird and apt to forget important matters, such as silence, when she got excited.

Therefore Pam, with food enough for two meals, was left among the boulders. The Skipper gave her certain instructions, but she added:

"You've got heaps of sense, Pam, so follow your own notions. I guess you won't be able to find out anything before the tide rises, but if you do, come to us how you can along the sands, we'll pick you off somehow."

Pam agreed, but she felt sure there would be small prospect of this. Her best line would be close observation and finally the rendezvous at the Fairies' Stones when the moon rose that night.

Her mind was at peace. No one would be anxious, and she was free to do what she could to help the Guides in her own way. Free to act as she had never had cause to act. Desperately interesting when you come to consider.

She saw the dinghy depart with an odd feeling of thrilled responsibility. Pen had looked back at her, and Pam interpreted the look. Pen was proud as she was. The dinghy drew alongside the yawl. Girls sprang on board. The painter was made fast. The Skipper stood on the counter looking up at the sky with comprehensive gaze. *Blue Bird* kept on shifting and changing her position—the puffs of wind were certainly strong—so strong that she pulled hard on

her anchor and a soft moaning sound came from her wire rigging, while her swallow-tailed burgee flew out from the topmast-head like a live bird.

" When the tide begins to rise the wind will get stronger," murmured Pam under her breath. She began to feel very wise in the sailor line.

Then the thought awoke that supposing anyone was watching, the attention of that person would be fixed on the yawl and her crew. Therefore now would be the moment to shift ground with success.

Without waiting then, Pam took up her job with her packet of " grub ", and using the scatter of rocks for cover she crept up, from one to the other, till she gained the brushwood shelter, dived into the bushes, climbing on till she reached the pine wood, and then, first making sure of protection from any view, she sat down for a last good look at the doings of *Blue Bird* and her crew.

She saw the Skipper take a turn or two at the winch, drawing the yawl nearer to her anchor, and concluded that Fred would not risk touching the sand, which was bare now in all directions. The whole bay was sand, rocks and tiny rivulets of clear busy water, each hurrying somewhere. Only in the real channel that cut up into the gorge was there still a stream—narrow, with wooded cliffs making shadow on the rocky base, while trees topped one side, and the Windmill of the Prince stood up on the very edge opposite.

Pam looked at the windmill, and her lip curled.

" I hate that girl," she whispered under her breath,

" mischievous pig—trying to wreck *Blue Bird*—any idiot could see that. I hope her own boat will get jolly well smashed up before she's done. She deserves to lose it, when she doesn't play the game."

So Pam, gazing devotedly at *Blue Bird* while her mind flashed back to a clear remembrance of mist and a white arm reaching up from water to a sagging rope. Certainly this enemy had not played the game, and Pam was ready at any price to thwart unfair plans.

For an hour or more she sat up there in the shadow of the fir trees, surrounded by dense thickets of brushwood and hazel. She made herself a careful peephole and watched the yawl, the tide, and the western coast line. In the circumstances it was not *possible* even for Etoile to come down river in the *Lanchon*. This gusty wind, growing in force, would be dead ahead of her, and the tide, rising now, was of course flowing up the channel.

Presently Pam realized the Skipper's move, for just a flutter of white jib flapped out over the bowsprit, and then the mainsail was hauled up half-way, hardly that, the peak hanging, while the anchor was lifted in over the bows. *Blue Bird* was going to run up the river under a mere handful of canvas hardly set. Wind and tide with her—very strongly—she was off to an anchorage opposite the Windmill and under the wall of the gorge on which the " enchanted " stone was perched up there where the wind-swept heath lay open to all weather.

Certainly Etoile would not sail down. Very well

then, if she came at all she would come by land, and if she came by land it would naturally have an object, that object being Lemoyne's ketch *L'Hirondelle*.

After seeing *Blue Bird* slide softly along between the sand bars with Fred at the helm, Pam considered her own position with care, then choosing a path that seemed to offer less difficulty in the briar line she went ahead, using all the clever tricks for preserving silence that she had noticed in the movements of Pat especially.

She came out without mischance right above the anchorage where the ketch lay, and even Pam's inexperience saw that Mr. Lemoyne was in uneasy circumstances, for the wind seemed to be full on shore, the wood full of queer rustling, sighings and fretful creaks, while the rising tide sucked to and fro, slapping the rocks, tossing upward, and rushing up beneath the bushes as though it were full of irritation and could hardly be kept back.

Pam knew very little, but she could see *two* anchor chains outboard and she wondered what would happen if the old *Swallow* came ashore in the night. Why had she not gone into the bay? Would she have been safer in the cove of La Tasse? Why was she here? That was the point of course; why indeed, if the wind was on shore?

Absorbed in conjecture of all kinds, Pam received a shock when suddenly a dead bough snapped close to her. She shrank down, flattening herself, saw a bush bend and spring back, heard an impatient exclamation, quite low spoken, and then—less than a minute, and

a head, a sleek dark head appeared immediately below her between two rocks. The head was bare, because the dark cap that had covered it was raised on a stick, lifted and depressed three times.

Pam dared not raise herself to see what happened in answer to the signal, but of course she realized that here must be an invitation to *L'Hirondelle*, so she crouched as low as she could squeeze and ardently wished she knew how to speak French as the Skipper spoke it. Indeed Pam registered a vow that she would certainly learn at least two languages in perfection, otherwise how could one excel as a real detective.

She was still making plans and thinking that her foot was going to sleep when a sound—very unexpected sound indeed—made her give a definite start. Close by, but from the broken ground of the rocky slope, came a man's voice, husky, out of breath, but very polite. It was Joseph Lemoyne apparently, and he said:

" Behold me, Mam'selle—all is very well but the weather! Oh là-là—but this naughty wind. I have the two anchors but what of that—what also about the packets? There is much tea. Oh, very much of the tea, and the tobacco—enough to fill the pockets of Madame, also is there not money for the cargo that is sold to England."

Pam understood enough to realize the sense of it all, and she was shocked. Indignation flashed through her mind. So *that* was the way of it. All the packages Camilla had seen went to England. Back came tea, tobacco, and money. Mr. Lemoyne wanted to get it

ashore—naturally, but—"Oh, the mean pigs," thought Pam as she frowned to herself, "They cheat our country of course, but they cheat their own too." Pam knew that tea was six or seven shillings a pound in France, and perhaps two shillings and sixpence in England. Well, there it was!

"How revolting that girl is," she thought; "fancy cheating her own country! Cam doesn't know that or she wouldn't be friends."

Pam, you see, did not quite realize her sister's knowledge and far-reaching patience with poor Etoile's mistaken efforts to increase the family means. The conference continued for some time, sometimes in hectic whispers, at others with emphasis and excited gestures. But Pam began to realize that she was learning very little about the actual intentions of this queer smuggling gang.

With her arms clasping her bent-up knees Pam sat, frowning, trying to understand. She came to the conclusion that the village would not be their destination, but the *castle* again—always the castle and the steps. Had not Marcus said the gate was open and the key not there, yet afterwards the fact was demonstrated to all and sundry that though the key was still not there the gate was locked.

Pam settled herself more comfortably, set her back against hazel stems and her head in a pleasant rest. She closed her eyes and slowly reviewed the various points.

It was not possible to move yet, the conspirators

would hear her, Etoile would see her running over the sands towards *Blue Bird's* new anchorage.

Then came flashes of vision.

Etoile had asked the Guides to bring the yawl up river in order to get them out of the way.

Of course—how plain it was!

Joseph Lemoyne would take *L'Hirondelle* round as soon as the tide was high, anchor under the castle and unload to-night—again—how plain it was! Michelle has got the key, the gate would be open and ready for them.

Of course.

And all the while Etoile would be keeping all the girls—Guides and castle girls—up there on the heath by the Fairies' Stones. No one to see, no one to interfere. Etoile had set the day for that purpose with the tide suitable and *Blue Bird* beguiled from her first moorings.

Not only that, Etoile had tried to wreck *Blue Bird* the night before the ketch was due—by cutting the anchor rope. Of course and of course could anything be plainer when one came to consider that girl's diplomacy.

How the wind was rising—there was a little whistling cry in its rush, and somewhere—a long way off—waves were washing on rock. The fir trees in the little wood along the spine of the rocky point were swaying and creaking, or was it the cordage and loose set sails of the big fishing boat below.

"Fancy making fools of us all like that," thought

Pam, her eyes tight closed, " bringing tea and masses of things up the steps while we were watching for fairies on the barren heath! But the Skipper would not be taken in; as soon as these disgusting people stopped talking and talking—they must have been at it for ages now—the girl would go back straight, and she, Pam, would then be free to follow and get taken off by the Guides. Heaps of time to warn them, nothing could be done yet by the ketch. There would be no move of any sort till the middle of the night—while now——"

Pam opened her eyes, because pins and needles had seized on one ankle. She shut them again and rubbed the bone, then she stretched her toes and jerked the instep, it was necessary to be very quiet or those conspirators would find out that she had been hidden close by.

As she shifted her legs, which seemed to have no power in them, she listened eagerly for sounds, but heard nothing, nothing the least like voices, that is, though she heard very distinctly the wash of water and the queer moaning cry of wind in the pines.

" Not nearly as hot as it was," thought Pam as she wriggled her shoulders in an effort to feel keenly awake, for somehow there was rather a sleepy thickness holding her back. She wanted to settle back against that little fork in the hazel bush and go to sleep. " No time for sleep *now*, anyway," she told herself, but one might have something to eat, she felt really hungry, quite ravenous.

Very cautiously Pam shifted ground and raised

herself to her knees; having done that she kneeled there quite breathlessly silent, taking in the situation. No girl with a sleek head sitting below among the rocks.

No Mr. Lemoyne, rather fat and hot. Nobody.

Not only that, there was *no ketch* down below, but raising her eyes and her fascinated gaze to the view of the grey sea, she saw the dull brown sails of a big fishing boat bending over as she tacked from the coast line on the left towards the west.

Pam's heart gave a little jump and then beat rather fast. She sat down again and laid hold of her packet of food, the impulse that moved her was to eat, and to get her mind in order, for everything was disordered, nothing seemed to be where she expected it to be, nor was the weather even what she thought it was.

Slightly thick and damp was the drift from the open sea and the scattered islands that dotted its grey waste. Not the soft still veil of the sea-fog, but something rather raw and stinging that came shorewards on the hard little gusts of wind.

The wood was full of movement too. The fir trees strained uneasily and slap, slap went irritable waves on rocks as they rushed over the ridges below and hit at the bare stones.

Pam opened her parcel and ate well. No earthly use going hungry and carrying the food, she reasoned, but all the same, as the whole situation came back in perfect sequence she felt herself blush all over. Little hot flushes of shame! She had been given a position of trust by the Skipper and she had gone to sleep—for

how long she could not be sure, because she had no watch on, but certainly hours. It must have been hours, because Etoile was gone, also the fisherman, and *L'Hirondelle* was far out there by the outer islands.

At first poor Pam felt rather distracted, then the worry grew less, for there was yet time and she was free to act at once.

Anyway she could make straight along the heath for *Blue Bird's* anchorage, go down the steep, hail the yawl and put the Skipper wise to the fact that Etoile had met up with Lemoyne and the ketch was coming in that night with her smuggled goods.

Really, the whole arrangement was now as plain as could be for all to understand. So Pam dusted her skirt and stood up.

CHAPTER XVII

The Skipper has a Plan

Blue Bird was not anchored below the Fairies' Stone, she had picked up a moorings' keg farther out, and lay dancing in rather excited fashion at the entrance of the river where little short waves came driving in before the grey gusts of wind from the outside.

The sails were not stowed, but lightly lashed to prevent them from blowing out from where they lay heaped against the wet spars. Here was a truly unpleasant evening and five girls on board the yawl wondering " what next ", calculating what might be the Skipper's next move, and what would happen about the rendezvous at the Fairies' Stone considering the poor prospects of moonlight.

The Skipper, sitting by herself in the steering well, was intent on the shore, the east shore, where heath stretched from the ruins of Saint Magloire to a point behind which the fishing ketch had run for shelter, and the girls had held that irregular picnic. The Skipper was watching for Pam and wondering rather at the delay.

Pam or no Pam she had formed her " conclusion of

the whole matter ", and that conclusion formed the reason why her little yawl was not moored farther up the river, but had taken up her position where a view of the outer bay was possible. This late afternoon was more like evening because of the clouds and the thick spindrift in from the open sea. Prospect of moonlight lessened; indeed, when she thought of that rendezvous under the moon arranged by the French girl, Fred's eyes twinkled with good-natured amusement, for in her opinion that plan was a very transparent ruse.

So she watched, searching the falling dusk, and the less she saw the more certainly did she make up her mind.

Pen was worried about Pam, very naturally perhaps, as she sat up on the wet fore-deck with her back against the mast and gazed at the darkening shore. Being intent on the one thing only she presently noticed a dark shape, first against the sky motionless, then, just as she decided it must be a rock or a furze clump it disappeared.

Penelope stiffened, sat up instead of leaning back and searched the foreshore with wide open eyes. This lasted for breathless minutes and then came a soft, wistful owl's call from the broken banks—one, two, three—very mournful the " w-h-ooo " floated away on the worrying wind. Without hesitation Pen answered the call, and before the cry died out Pat and Lesley were beside her, eagerly whispering.

" Yes, Pam—it's our family call," Pen answered, " you can't mistake it; can't we take the dinghy, Pat, and get her?"

Even while they conferred the Skipper had seen and acted. The gentle rub of *Dickie Bird* the dinghy could be felt against *Blue Bird's* fenders, and then the whistle that hailed her crew.

" Come on, you two," said Fred, " it's Pam. I guess she has something to tell us."

Pen would have liked to go, but said no word, for the strict discipline of this crew had gripped her, and she realized that the Anson girls knew the work better than she did.

From the well she watched, saw the dancing dinghy cut across the water and become merged in the shore shadows. Fred put a hand on her shoulder.

" Don't you be surprised if we have to pick off Camilla and the boy before long," she said.

Pen looked at her, surprised.

" Pick off?" she echoed inquiringly.

" From Miss Etoile's boat the *Lanchon*. She is there anchored in-shore near the Windmill. It was arranged that *she*—I mean Miss de Ruvigny—was to bring over Camilla and Marcus. She will do nothing of the sort, you will see, but *they* will be planted there on board, well out of the way, waiting for her! She told them to wait, didn't she?"

" Of course. I know," murmured Pen rather startled, and she began to consider the whole affair from a new point of view.

Then came the dinghy in little short jumps, water splashing over her gunwale.

As Pam came over the counter she said:

" It *is* windy. I say, Skipper, let me confess to start with: I'm a sickening fraud, I went to sleep."

" That's all right," said Fred, " come along in the cabin where we can hear ourselves think and tell us what you found out when you were awake. Lash on the dinghy, Les, we may want her again before long."

The two girls did as they were told, and then flung themselves down into the steering well to listen with eager heads bent towards the companion way. They gathered the pith of the story. Etoile had come, very quietly, had conferred so long with Lemoyne that Pamela confessed that she dozed. Small wonder after the wakeful night and the experience on *Blue Bird*. The Skipper allowed that with a friendly smile.

" And when you woke she was gone, and Joseph, *and* the ketch—Eh?" she asked.

Pam nodded, her lips quivering.

" I never saw—a *thing*," she murmured.

" Two and two make four all the same," said Fred. " It is quite as simple to me as though you had watched every movement. Etoile went off with Joseph and his crowd on *L'Hirondelle*, and when you saw the ketch beating out she had Miss de Ruvigny on board——"

" Oh——" gasped Pam, and her gasp was echoed by two voices from the companion.

" Just what I expected," said Pat with decision.

" Just what she would do," agreed Les, " *we* never saw her come back."

" And the Fairy Stone bubble was a red herring to

get everyone out of the way," remarked Nell from the bunk where she lay listening, " I always mistrusted that young person's eagerness to amuse and instruct the public."

" They will come into the bay and unload at the castle stairs," said the Skipper with calm assurance. " I would not mind stating as a fact that *L'Hirondelle* has a pretty solid cargo of tea from England, tea, tobacco, spirits—the things these men fetch over and sell for nearly double in this country. I suppose they dare not land them at Petit Colin, too many observers about. They store the cases in the castle and sell the goods in detail. Well, well, Mademoiselle does not do so badly, I suppose. But she is bound to be found out and——"

Fred checked on a thoughtful frown.

" And?" questioned Pam anxiously.

" I was just thinking it would be *very* awkward for the de Ruvigny family for Miss Etoile to be caught on the ketch with that gang of smugglers. So—so discreditable," said the Skipper, with her lips setting in a firm line.

" Serve her right," commented Nell, with eyes gazing up at the boards above her bunk.

Lesley and Pat looked across at her.

" Oh—poor thing," they exclaimed with one deprecating voice, " can't we pull her out of the mess, Skipper, she's an awfully decent sailor and she hasn't got so very much fun in life, has she?"

" Wish we *could*," echoed Pam, seconding eagerly.

There was a silence of thought, all round.

Then the Skipper made a statement of her definite plan.

" Look here—Guides and Pam, this is what I propose. Someone, I think Pam, should be set ashore, go up to the Fairy Stone and wait, on guard in case anyone—even Etoile, *might* come there. Of course Camilla and Marcus might—quite likely. We, on our part, will send over to the rock quay under the Windmill and see if anyone is *there*. If Camilla is, we will suggest her going home, as moonlight séances would be sheer bunkum to-night in any case, and it would be no pleasure to her to come here; on the contrary, someone should go back to the Castle and hold that postern gate against all comers."

" *Good*," said Pat firmly, " but what about Etoile?"

The Skipper gave a little laugh.

" Sufficient unto the day," she retorted, " we will get off Camilla first; then wait till the tide is lower down. I want quite a low tide for my plan—also I want those plotters to try and get into the castle *first*, then I'll be able to spring a plan on the young woman that might really clinch the matter—perhaps for good. I'll tell you Guides later—but honestly I aim to get Etoile out of this mess if it can be done, but no more details now. Get busy, you two, and put Pam ashore. Give her a parcel of grub, she must be hungry as a cormorant."

In a moment the crew sprang to activity, the dinghy was hauled in and Pam put ashore with an untidy package of provender.

" I say, Pam," whispered Pat eagerly, " you are not *nervous* are you, because if you are I'll——"

" Not a shred, not one *dreg*," declared Pam eagerly, " I'm most frightfully pleased to be any sort of use, in fact I think your Skipper is a gem to give me *any* job after my going to sleep. I shan't again. If you do find old Cam, tell her I'm here all safe, and tell her to go home."

Perhaps half an hour after that the Guides touched the rock quay below the Windmill cliff and the Skipper stepped ashore to investigate matters with regard to Camilla.

There they were. Cam and Marcus crouched under the protection of the height, rather wet, rather cold, but chiefly worried and tense with disturbance because Etoile had never appeared. Here were they at the rendezvous with the little lug-sailed *Lanchon* rocking in her sheltered dock, the tide ebbing more and more, and no one to take them across to the haunted stone of the Déhusets. It was, as Marcus said, " a rotten frost," also he opined that " it was a bit of an eye-opener ".

The Skipper landed, sat down by Camilla and explained the situation up to date—exactly too, in her accurate careful way. She never seemed to get excited or to exaggerate.

Camilla turned pink to her ears, and then white as she grasped the story.

" Then Pam is all right," she said.

" On the other side, keeping watch by the Stone."

" And you really think that Etoile has—that she will——", Camilla hesitated.

" No question," said Fred firmly. " Take my advice, Cam, go straight back, you and Marcus, and defend your castle. Make your own plan of course, but *stick* it, my dear girl."

Camilla stood up, Marcus also actually hopping on eager feet.

" And for the rest, trust me," said the Skipper as she turned away smiling.

CHAPTER XVIII

Claudia takes a Hand

On that evening after supper Claudia told her mother frankly that she did not like the look of the weather, and she did not believe it would be possible for the girls to have a rendezvous at the Fairy Stone.

Having put June to bed she was contemplating grey, wet, and stormy life from the window-seat of the dining-room with an anxious frown, while her mother sat sewing industriously by the light of one candle.

" Where is *Blue Bird*?" asked Mrs. Carmichael.

" She is anchored near the mouth of the river, not very close to the Déhusets. I went out to the drawbridge to look and then along to the cliff edge. I could just see figures on board, but not what they were. I saw nothing of that girl Etoile, or of Cam and Marcus. For all one knew they might be in the Windmill, as of course it is not time yet for the Fairy business, but, Mummy——"

" Well?" Mrs. Carmichael dropped her busy fingers on to her lap, and looked at her worried daughter.

" I have a firm conviction that all the fuss about this visit to Fairy Stones and getting the girls together for

a moonlight expedition is—is—well, bunkum—what Marcus calls " tommy rot ". *I* believe Etoile wanted to get everybody out of the bay in order to clear decks for some smuggling business. I am *sure* that ketch of Lemoyne's is planning to come in and cart goods to our castle, via the cliff steps and the postern gate. I know he anchors in La Tasse Bay, we all know they use this place habitually and, Mummy, we ought not to shut our eyes to the fact that Michelle is Lemoyne's wife and has been helping the men for years. By the way, did she—has she given you back the key?"

Mrs. Carmichael shook her head.

" She vows it is lost."

" Mother, you will see it will be lost till after they have got this cargo in. We shall have no peace till she has gone; poor soul, though," added Claudia hastily, " one can hardly blame her; she is helping her husband and her young lady whom she adores, to make money. One need not be furious, but honestly, we can't allow it to go on or we shall get into a bad mess with the Customs' people. We simply *must* stop it. They have got our girls and the Guides' yawl out of the way, and they *think* the coast is clear. Should you mind if I go out and scout a bit in a little while when it is a little darker? You will have Bethia, she's a host in herself if I warn her; you could not frighten Bethia, she is on a rock foundation. I am going to take Mrs. Mac into her room so I will speak about it."

Claudia returned quickly from this errand and the two of them went out into the courtyard and up the

narrow steps on to the ramparts to see what could be seen. The sun had disappeared into a blur of stormy smudge, all the rest was racing cloud and thick spindrift. Fishing boats moored in La Tasse cove were rolling wildly in grey tossing water. One reddish brown sail was driving straight into the bay from the open sea. It was a clumsy craft, ketch rigged and came as though it knew the waters.

" Ah," said Claudia, and she pointed.

The two looked at one another.

" I think I'll trot along to Petit Colin," said Claudia, ' if I got a boat in La Tasse I should be seen, also most probably upset in the smother below—it will be *quite* calm and low tide nearly up in the river. I will cross, get along to the Fairy Stone, see what is on foot and fetch back any of our girls who might be there. If I get a chance I'll warn the Guides about Lemoyne coming in. I don't believe for one moment that Etoile is with our girls, should not be surprised if she were *here*——"

" Here!" echoed Mrs. Carmichael.

" Yes, in the castle ready to help Michelle over this cargo job. Of *course* that ketch is Lemoyne's, and of *course* that is why she got *Blue Bird* out of the way."

Ten minutes or so after that, Mrs. Osmond looking very like Camilla in her short blue dress and little close hat ran in to speak to Bethia who was turning down beds without a crease, and pursuing her orderly routine whatever might happen.

" Bethia," said Claudia, " will you please look after

the mistress and will you keep your eyes open on Michelle——"

"Yes, miss—I mean ma'am," said Bethia.

"We think she has got the key of the little gate in the wall, and might go along to open it to-night."

"Yes, miss," said Bethia again.

"I am going over to get the young ladies back," explained Claudia; "there is bad weather coming, a nasty night, it is a worry to my mother having the children out. I thought I had better get them all home."

"Yes, miss," agreed Bethia, pulling a fold straight.

As Claudia went out she thought what a wonderful gift was a temperament like that of Bethia Parbury. If your house blows up you say "dear me what a dust", and sneeze, but you never worry.

Mrs. Carmichael saw her through the wicket gate, told her she would keep the key, and a curlew call, or the owl's cry would bring an answer.

"I'll look after June," said the mother of all the family as she smiled through the bars, and Mrs. Osmond thought "there is nobody like her", as she took to her heels and went running over the heath. First then, she made for the cliff's edge, and looked down on the river.

Windy, wet, and grey was the melancholy twilight; she could see the shape of *Blue Bird* near the entrance, her sharp bows facing up stream and her riding light shining like a white star. The dinghy was not astern, and Claudia wondered where was the little boat, not

guessing that she was at that moment putting Pam ashore at the foot of the broken steep below the Fairy Stone, while Camilla and Marcus were crouching beneath the Windmill cliffs waiting patiently for the advent of Etoile.

Claudia, at the top of that cliff, looked down and thought she saw Etoile's boat the *Lanchon* by the rocks, but Cam, intent on the movements of the dinghy heard nothing.

Then Claudia, cautious of steps, yet running, made for the head of the gorge at her best speed. Looking at the Windmill as she passed, she saw the usual light but neither heard nor saw sign of human life. Had Camilla and Marcus been there with Etoile she believed she must have noticed voices or laughter even, as more than one small window stood open. Where her sister and the boy could have got to was a puzzle to Claudia.

Within ten minutes, or little more, she checked her pace to follow carefully the path down the cliff leading to the hamlet of Le Petit Colin.

Down in the shelter of the gorge was little wind, and no disturbance of the low water, yet Claudia, who was sensitive to impressions like all her family, *felt* something in the atmosphere as it were of excitement. In the queer little stone cottages were lights and movement. Men stood together talking and smoking but with something of expectation in their way of doing it.

Instantly Claudia was awake to the belief that

Customs' officials might be on the way, and the inhabitants of the hamlet on the look-out for enforcement of " Le Droit de Douane ".

No time should be lost, she saw, in getting her sisters back within home shelter, and warning the Guides.

" Low tide," thought Claudia, " too low perhaps for boat manœuvres, up here at the river head. Or some important person had not arrived on the scene of action."

Summoning her best French she chartered a small boat, saying she must get across to pick up her sisters who were at the Stones of Les Déhusets to try and see the Fairies dance.

Whether that fisherman believed her, who shall say, but he was—as they always are—perfectly courteous and of manners irreproachable. He let her have his boat on payment of fifty francs. As Claudia stepped into her place she said:

" I will return your beautiful boat but soon, monsieur," in the soft Carmichael voice which was so oddly sweet, and monsieur bowed with charming courtesy, his heart warmed by the fifty-franc note and any suspicions he might have felt laid to rest.

As Claudia dipped her oars she sighed with relief at getting through the place successfully.

Down stream she went, chiefly pushing as the water was so low, till she came level with the place of rendezvous. Then she picked out a reasonable landing-place and shoved her boat into the broken shore. It was a wet, muddy business but she went through all regard-

less of shoes and stockings, fixed the little anchor and started up the side of the gorge which was very very steep yet hardly a cliff.

She arrived at the top scratched and dirty. Also a little annoyed with people who would do foolish things in impossible weather, for the nearer she got to the top the stronger became the gusts of wind from the open bay.

Here were stunted bushes, much gorse and the collection of great stones round which superstition clung. As she advanced, looking eagerly, she made out—one centre stone balanced on a small base—rather like a huge humming top in shape; tall stones standing round like sentinels, smaller stones strewn between.

Yes, this must be Les Déhusets, but as for moonlight——!

Claudia stood still gazing, taking in the queer loneliness of the shadowy scene.

It was then she noticed a small dark figure seated motionless on a flat rock. Here was someone at least. Claudia made towards the stone. The small dark figure sprang up and ran towards her.

" Oh, *darling* thing," came a gasping exclamation, " I did wonder who it was! But, Claud, why *you*?"

" And, Pam dear, why you? All alone! What *are* you doing here, poor chicken? I got a boat from Petit Colin and came to fetch anyone I could pick up as Mummy and I were sure the Fairy plan would be a frost—no moon, and weather worse and worse. Where are the others?"

" Pen is on *Blue Bird.* Nobody has seen Cam or Marcus as far as I know—as for that female Etoile, *she's* a frost if you like! Yes, let us go back but we must go down to *Blue Bird* and warn the Skipper. I am a scout, you see."

" You are, are you?" said Claudia, hiding a smile at the tone of pride, " very useful thing to be, but we must put off this rendezvous for a fine night; nothing can happen now, it is getting worse and besides——"

" Besides?" questioned Pam beginning to eat a sandwich to check her tendency to feel shivery. One's teeth do not chatter while one eats, anyway.

Claudia described her impression of the atmosphere at Petit Colin.

" They seemed to be very wide awake and—waiting," she concluded.

" Well, everybody is rather dotty, *I* think," said Pam judicially, starting on another sandwich. " I feel better now, let's row to *Blue Bird* and tell that gem of a Skipper. But I don't believe Pen will want to come, she is perfectly *besotted* about Pat and Les."

Claudia laughed, and off they went down the steep to the bank of the river, Pam in highest spirits.

It was no easy matter to get the boat off; what Pam called " very squishy conditions "; however there were two to shove this time, and within a short time those two drew alongside *Blue Bird.*

The whole crew was waiting eagerly in the steering well; having heard the soft plunk of oars they were very alert.

Claudia explained in a few words:

" I'm taking back Pam," she said finally, " the rendezvous is a bit of a fraud and——"

The Skipper said what she thought of that, after which she questioned Claudia about Lemoyne's *Hirondelle*, and grunted at her answers.

" You think Le Petit Colin is starting to act," she said, " well, that means *we* must be previous—we must save that goose of a girl from her folly."

" What shall you do?" asked Claudia, while the others listened breathless.

" I'm going to fetch her—and as there is not enough water to take round our yawl in safety, I am going to bring her off in her own boat. Les, Pat, and I will sail the *Lanchon* round to the ketch—if that does not wake up Miss Etoile to come and take a hand I shall be surprised. Put us on board of her now, would you? It will save time."

CHAPTER XIX

In which Camilla defends her Castle

Mrs. Carmichael went to bed in Claudia's room after explaining to June, who liked to hear and sympathize with explanations, that her mother was gone across the river to find all the aunties, because the wind was blowing so hard.

" That *is* tiresome," said June, " it leaves us all alone," and went to sleep again. So did the mother of everybody in due course. You couldn't hear how hard the wind blew in that tower and with a north-east loophole.

But not so Bethia. Her sense of responsibility was very wide-awake and the cook was on her mind as well as on her conscience. Bethia's common-sense revolted against Michelle's behaviour, she thought it was " unsuitable an' unbecoming ".

Bethia had shrewd instincts, though she could have explained nothing of what she felt, so she did not undress, but sat on the edge of her bed after putting on felt slippers. Then she waited, listening.

The wind was so loud that listening helped not at

all. Bethia therefore decided to see, if anything was to be seen, and putting on a neat waterproof coat of a dark blue tint she went out into the brick-floored dining-room and sat on the window-seat.

When concealed there, quiet as a cat, Bethia was sure she saw a black shape come up the little steps from the kitchen; she gathered herself into a bundle within the curtain and watched breathless.

That black shape was in a hurry—it came to the front door up three steps, and Bethia heard movement within the lobby, where low arched doorways met and the long stone passage led to the stair in the tower. Someone peeped into the brick-floored room and listened.

Bethia held her breath.

" Pity the mistress haven't got a nice dog," thought Bethia, enraged at these liberties. Someone departed, so quietly that it must have been another sense than hearing that told Bethia what had happened. She waited, but no dark shape returned to the kitchen steps.

" That cook up to her tricks," commented Bethia's mind, and she decided what to do. The mistress trusted her to see to this business, she saw her plain duty, and *duty* was Bethia's aim and standard.

Slipping along with soft steps she went to the foot of the stairs, and made her way up into the queer confusion of masonry where the spiral stair of the tower began and the black tunnels of the rampart passages met. Bethia stood still and listened. You could not

have imagined a figure more unsuited to the situation. All the same, no heroine of the old fighting days had a bigger heart than Bethia Parbury. The mistress was alone in this uncomfortable castle and trusted her to see things through. Whatever it cost, Bethia was not going to fail the trust.

She stood at the angle of the meeting tunnels, listening. Far down in the dark facing east, the passage that led to the postern gate direct, Bethia heard a sudden noise, as though someone stumbled or a brick fell.

" Oho, my lady, so you're there," said Bethia with sinister meaning and off she went.

She had no flash lamp, nothing to guide her but a box of matches in the pocket of her coat. Some people always carry a box of matches, and Bethia was one, it was always her anchor and stand-by. Being a country girl she was quick on her feet too, and not apt to stumble over chance obstacles. She went the way that the girls had discovered one after the other, and presently came to the end tower and the few steep steps down to the heavy little door in its deep recessed arch. Bethia knew all about the door and the key. She " suspicioned " Michelle with all her heart, had done so from the first moment as a matter of fact, though she did not realize her own perception. She crept down those steps with infinite caution and felt over the lock in the dark.

Her fingers touched *a key*.

As everybody knew, the key was *lost*, and the cook

commanded to find it; this was sufficiently remarkable, but more surprises were to follow.

As Bethia's fingers explored the ponderous lock a whistling scream of wind seemed to reach her through the door and she *felt* the massive oak and iron move towards her. Move so that a wet blast screeched through the crack that opened and Bethia saw a long strip of grey light between door and masonry.

The door was open. The key was in the lock, inside. Two and two make four, unquestionably Michelle Lemoyne was *outside*.

"Can't say as I envy her," was Bethia's mental comment, and considering the strength of that wailing wind a very practical one. "She never even latched it, silly thing," muttered the girl, "my word; it's a judgment on her for telling wicked stories; she declared she never knew where the key had got to! Well, she's caught."

Softly Bethia's fingers lifted the latch into place as she pushed her weight on the door. With equal caution she turned the key, pulled it out, and put it into her coat pocket with the match box.

The feel of that box made Bethia consider the possibility of light, so she struck a match, gazed at the lock, the shot bolt, and chuckled.

"My word," she murmured, "an' now mistress can keep the key."

That great point settled, it occurred to her to try and see who was outside and whether there was anything to report. "Likely as not there's a window,"

Bethia decided, and she went back the way she came to the rampart passage and then entered upon the south tunnel which overlooked the bay and its wind-blown water.

Very soon Bethia came to the loophole through which Marcus and Camilla had seen the yawl high and dry on the sand, and there she met the full gusts of salt wind and saw the churning excitement in the bay. Saw, that is to say, after a while, for at first the noise and the confusion made matters difficult to disentangle.

Bethia Parbury however was a practical person, not apt to disturbance, taking events, as they came, in a literal way.

" Seems to be blowin' a bit," she muttered, " and there's that clumsy big ship as belongs to Mr. Lemoyne —seen it before."

Bethia continued to look, and presently, becoming used to the greyness, the clouds, the wet and the noise, she picked out a figure on the rock stairs below, a boat landing from the ketch and men lifting cases from the heaving boat on to the slimy steps.

" Well I never!" murmured Bethia, " but when you come to think, it's just the sort of night to finish a job you aim to do secret like." She gazed down at the shining oilskins of the men who laboured and at the streams of foamy water that lashed the rocks and swirled up the glistening rock steps.

So intent was Bethia on the drama acted below that she did not hear her own name till it had been repeated several times, then a hand gripped her arm.

Undoubtedly great credit is due to Miss Parbury for the way in which she took the surprise, she simply released her arm with a jerk and looked round. Then the first thing she said was:

" Beg pardon, miss, I'm sure," Bethia was afraid she had been disrespectful, " I never thought it was you."

" All right," said Cam, for Camilla it was, and not only Camilla, but Marcus. " What is going on down there? The gate is locked, they can't get in."

Bethia slipped off her perch on the deep ledge, which was immediately filled by Marcus. The two girls leaned against the wall out of the wind, and Bethia spoke.

" Why, Miss Cam, I thought you was with the others. Whatever has been happening? Miss Claudia's gone. "

" Oh, I know," said Camilla, who looked white and worried, " I called for mother to open the gate and she told me. She said you might be here, as Marcus found you were not in your room. We suppose Mrs. Osmond is on the other side, but we don't know for sure, because Miss Etoile never came to take us off. We waited and waited down at the bottom below the Windmill; she had told us to wait there by the rock quay and she would pick us up and get us across. The Guides told us to come home. They said it would be no use waiting. So we came."

Cam sighed; she would not admit even to herself that there was something wrong about the non-

appearance of Etoile. She had made such definite plans, emphasized the importance of Cam and Marcus meeting her down below in the little rock cove, talked so much about the mysteries of Les Déhusets—and then—*this*. Cam *would* not believe Etoile had cheated deliberately.

Camilla talked in a low voice to Bethia, saying a lot of things to fill up the time, as people do when they are rather making up a case against their own reasoning.

Marcus was sitting up in the ledge, engrossed, very intent, but silent.

In a pause Bethia said in her neat respectful way:

" The mistress will be pleased, Miss Cam, I got the key all safe. When I come down that there gate was on the jar and wind reg'lar squealin' through. Seemed likely there was somebody downstairs, but I didn't stop to look, I turned the key and here it is. Will you take it, Miss Cam, or shall I give it to the mistress?"

Cam took the key slowly, as she did so she asked:

" Where's Michelle, is she in bed?"

" Well no, Miss Cam. It was seein' her go along as set me on coming to look at the gate. But if she's outside she must be wet as wet with them waves making such a fuss and the whole place in a smother."

" Oh," murmured Cam. " Oh dear!"

Then Marcus turned round.

" There's a ter-rible riot going on down here, Cam—simply *marvellous* industry. Far as I can make

out our useful cook is busy as a bee—she's a jolly strong man, anyway. And your friend Miss de Ruvigny is on the ketch directing operations while——"

"*Marc*, don't be idiotic—it's impossible." Camilla spoke with the authority of a grown-up sister, but Marcus was not impressed.

"Well, come and see for yourself," he said; "there's a bit of light every now and then when the clouds break and it went bang on to her just now—she's standing up in the stern of the old *Hirondelle*, jolly good footing too, considering how the ketch jumps. I suppose they're trying to get things off before the tide turns, because when it starts it will sweep the old ketch quite a long way down. I *say*, they are carrying a lot of boxes on to the steps. Fancy, our steps! They jolly well deserve to be caught, I must say."

Cam said nothing, but she went and looked from the loophole, waiting with rather set lips for a break in the racing cloud. Presently the chance came and a fitful finger of light pointed down straight on to the reeling wet deck of *L'Hirondelle*, where stood balanced with one hand on a wire stay, the slim black figure that Cam had admired so whole-heartedly. She was covered by an oilskin coat that shone with wet, and was directing operations in which certain smallish square chests were shifted over the side into the rocking dinghy by men, also in oilskins. Cam looked, flushed, turned white, said: "I see," and on the instant made up her mind what to do, so she said:

"I'm sorry, Marc, but it can't be allowed. I've

got to prevent them coming through. It's the only way to stop this business. After all, this is mother's house *now*, and she might get into serious trouble with the French Douane authorities."

"Right you are," agreed Marcus, "if they choose to do it otherwhere it's their own funeral, but we've got to snuff out all these busy games in the castle. Well, Cam, it's up to you; Bethia and self will be A.D.C.s."

Cam said nothing, but her imagination saw and her sensitive soul shrank from the job to be met. She told her brother to run along back to the tower and tell their mother that all was well.

"Just give her an idea, Marc," she advised, "she'll understand; tell her all details will be told later, but we've got to stick here till they are through. I mean till we have finished off our part once for all, and—come back, Marc," she added as she saw his face fall, though he slid to his feet obediently. "Come back, as I want to have somebody. I can't spare you. I hate doing this alone."

Marcus went with speed. Camilla took his place at the loophole and watched.

The tide was turning, and as the weight of the ebb started to meet the wind the hard gusts began to increase in force, so that the storm screamed round the battlements and foam was caught up on the wings of the gale, hitting her face like hail.

Camilla saw the ketch sway broadside on between wind and tide, saw the sturdy craft roll and shift her

bed, gradually turning blunt bows towards the castle, for the tide was rushing out like a millstream, the waves leaping up as they raced over the rocks.

Camilla's heart began to beat as she saw the big clinker-built dinghy rowed alongside and the slim figure in wet oilskins jump down into it. The inference was plain: Etoile de Ruvigny intended to land at the castle steps and bring all these goods inside. She understood that Michelle had the key and she could do as she liked.

Of course the thing happened. There they were down below on the steps, getting up in all haste to avoid the rush of the waves. It was hardly possible to distinguish figures, as all were in oilskins, but there were several men, and they were all coming up.

Cam felt her heart steadily thumping, and it was with a feeling of relief that she saw Bethia leaning close to her, quite unmoved as usual.

"Master Marcus has come back," said Bethia; "the mistress says she's not worrying, and he was to say Miss Claudia and Miss Pam have come home, as there wasn't no treat in staying out."

"I should think not," gasped Cam, bursting into a small giggle, partly nervous excitement; "now then, Marc, they are all coming up."

"What are you going to do, Cam?" asked the boy with interest.

"Open the gate," answered Cam drily.

Marcus, glancing at his sister's face, was still more interested.

In a few minutes the latch was lifted and shaken, the door pushed and kicked. First by a woman, secondly and obviously by a man. They found it fast, and a pause ensued.

Camilla turned the key, opened the door and stood in the doorway. She felt that her French was not important enough to cope with all that might ensue, so she confined her remarks to the shortest instructions.

" No one," said Cam in a voice that shook the least bit, " *no one* may enter this gate except Miss de Ruvigny. My mother permits her to pass through the castle and to depart by the drawbridge. Every other person will return to the vessel of Monsieur Lemoyne —the conduct of Madame Lemoyne is treacherous, it is vile, she will not again be allowed to enter while Mrs. Carmichael possesses the castle. Enter, Mademoiselle de Ruvigny," said Cam, looking Etoile in the face, " then I will lock this gate."

" I thank you, Mademoiselle Carmichael," answered the French girl, staring back at the speaker, " you are courteous, but I remain with my friends. If they must stay outside, I also. To desert one's friends is not my part."

Camilla had read in books about eyes that " blazed ", she had never seen the phenomenon till that moment when it seemed to her that Etoile's eyes literally shot sparks from beneath the peak of her sou'wester. She, Etoile, was white and haggard with anger, she considered herself ill-used, naturally, because her own

side of this very odd question was all-prevailing in her mind, and here was she with several hundred pounds of contraband tea shut out from storage in the place she was accustomed to use with impunity.

"Vile—cruel—wicked," gasped the cook in broken English.

"You can't talk, Mrs. Michelle," retorted Bethia with swift vigour; "what about the way you been cheating my mistress?"

"Hush," ordered Cam promptly, "we can't have rude remarks either way. If Miss de Ruvigny will come through now, and leave by the gate house, well and good; if not, I'm afraid we must close this postern and all of you will stop on the ketch, unless Mr. Lemoyne rows you round to the Windmill; perhaps that would be more comfortable."

She spoke in a mixture of French and English, and looked at Etoile, who, for her part, flung out her hands in a dramatic gesture and then walked off down the steps.

Cam shut the door, locked it, stood a moment or two turning the heavy key round and round in fingers that trembled a very little. Then she glanced up at Marcus and saw he was laughing.

"I say, old girl," he said, looking at her wet eyes and set lips, "it's an awful racket about nothing, really. They can sleep on the ketch, it's all right, only fishy—and, Cam, they won't do it again through *us*, anyway. It had got to be stopped, that Michelle was past bearing. It serves them right to have to pack the tea again, but

truly it was beastly bad form using our house to stow the things in, it might have got Mum into an awful mess—fines and all that."

"Yes, I couldn't have done anything else. I must go and tell Mummy and Claud," said poor Cam, "why won't people be sensible?"

"I hope Michelle will be sick," added Marcus, "but unluckily the low tide will leave them nice and quiet on the sand, so probably she'll be excused."

CHAPTER XX

L'Entente Cordiale in Camilla's Castle

When the wet wind-blown morning shone out happily, the Skipper came ashore bringing Pen who was feeling a little more important than usual—equal to Pam in fact.

Gathered together in the parlour with sun glowing on the white walls and groined ceiling the Skipper made clear the final adventure of Lemoyne's ketch and her part in it.

"To begin with," said the Skipper, "I had no intention of wrecking my *Blue Bird*, so I left her——"

"With *us*," put in Pen, "Nell and I looked after her, you see. Skipper left us on guard and she took Les and Pat——"

Pam looked critically at her sister. The rest of the family smiled to itself, Mrs. Carmichael not sorry to see her very subdued Pen waking up to hold her own.

"I beg your pardon, Skipper," apologized Pen when silence ensued, "*you* tell. I ought not to have interrupted."

The Skipper went on unmoved as usual.

" I was pretty sure the French girl was on the ketch. The whole plan led up to that intention. She met Lemoyne in the east bay, and came in with him, while she had concocted her Fairy rendezvous to get us all out of the way and get the bay and the castle steps to herself. Her mistake was in counting us all out as half-witted."

" Pam scouted at the east bay and brought along important news——"

Here Pam turned pink and wanted to explain, but was cut short.

" Then she kept watch at the rendezvous, met up with Mrs. Osmond and they brought us most important information about the liveliness at Le Petit Colin. *That* was what made me decide finally on our move. Having let Camilla and Marcus know there was nothing doing, we three boarded the *Lanchon* and took her round to the bay," here the Skipper nodded towards the steps.

" I rather wonder you were not afraid of smashing up the girl's boat," said Claudia, " she deserved it, but still——"

" I was not aiming to punish her," said Fred, " that boat draws so little water, she is small and handy. I should be far more likely to smash *Blue Bird*, and that I did not mean to do, especially as it would be the sort of event that would play the smugglers' game finely. My plan was to get the silly thing off the ketch and save her mother paying a fine she could not afford, besides disgracing the family name. *Lanchon* went

like a bird, she's a handy little craft and deserves to be sailed in cleaner games than this rotten smuggling business. The tide was jolly low but there was water enough for her, and we went down river like a streak, then tacked across to get into a useful position and dropped into La Tasse Bay where it was a bit less jumpy."

"When did she see you?" asked Cam, quivering with excitement.

"Could not tell, but they saw us pretty quick; you see they were simply tied up, ketch on the sand, impossible to get out till tide rose and wind on shore. We ran *Lanchon* alongside and I went on board."

"You did!" cried three voices in amaze.

"Impossible to explain in shouts," said the Skipper, "so I boarded the ketch and I said to the girl: 'Look here, don't be a fool; what on earth is the good of hanging out here on the sand? When the tide rises Lemoyne can get up river and do as he chooses, *you* are only in the way here——'"

"You did not mention the Douane fear then?" interrupted Mrs. Carmichael.

"Rather not. It would have nailed her to the deck, and broken her mother's heart into the bargain. She is a very romantic and obstinate piece," said the Skipper, with a dry smile. "Oh no, I simply said it was on the cards I might smash up *Lanchon* as she was a stranger, so to speak, and I did not know the bay as well as a resident might. I told her to come on board and see to the steering. Fortunately old Lemoyne

backed me up. *They* didn't want her when she could not open the gate for them; they wanted to go to bed till the tide rose—And so that's *that*——"

The Skipper checked, greatly relieved at getting to the end of her story.

"And she *came*?" questioned Camilla eagerly.

"Oh, rather. Came, put us on *Blue Bird*, anchored herself and went up to the Windmill just in good time to clear the whole affair and save her skin."

"I *am* so glad," murmured Cam with fervour, "poor Etoile, she is *so* uncommon. So like her Castle, don't you think?"

"I dare say," allowed Fred, "but that kind of uncommon people make seas of trouble for their harmless relations at times. She's quite a good sort. This morning early she came and looked over her boat, found it was intact, came on and boarded *Blue Bird*, thanked us quite nicely for getting her off the ketch—never mentioned their little games by the way—and went wild over the yawl. Understood her from burgee to copper keel, I will say that; she asked a ream of questions. We fed her with coffee and scones and she asked to come again."

"My dear Skipper," said Mrs. Carmichael, "if I am not mistaken you will be the saving of that young woman. What she needs is a few sensible, practical friends. She's here isolated in her castle and got her head full up with wild ideas in which she was brought up by those faithful but wrong-headed Lemoynes."

"There was one rather obvious advantage in my

little move," went on the Skipper, " her *Lanchon* was anchored below the Windmill when the Douane men went by. They saw her. And Etoile was *not* on the ketch. By the way we saw the men impounding a lot of big cases early this morning, tea and tobacco no doubt. Lemoyne and his crowd will be snuffed out. Of course one can help the poor souls to pay up their fines, that is nothing, but I mean there will be no more of this hole and corner game. You will have your castle to yourself, Mrs. Carmichael."

. . . . . .

And so it proved.

Having crowded a whole adventure book into those first days, " Le Camp Geffroy " settled down into what Pam called " utter perfection ".

Poor Etoile became a valued ally in the sailing line, her pluck and knowledge of tides and coast were most important to the rest of the party and added immensely to the joys of that most glorious summer.

Though she did not talk about it the other girls, and probably the village, knew that the Skipper cleared off those fines for the fishermen who had made a mess of things. It went through the right hands.

Fred simply said:

" Oh, I'd do anything for the French, so would all of us."

So would all of us.

At one time it had seemed as though the Entente Cordiale might be a wee bit strained owing to the zeal of poor Michelle and Etoile's capacity for adventure,

but the Guides stepping in—or rather sailing in—forged strong links anew, while wives and daughters of sailors in Gudfried's stronghold backed up their efforts.

Etoile learned the rules and drill of H.M.S. *Téméraire* on board the *Blue Bird* and all was well.

Whether Camilla has written her story yet one is not at liberty to say, but she has plenty of material—never once did anyone forget that her inspiration of a " Castle " had brought them to the " Fief of Gudfried " which means " La Paix de Dieu ".

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